

CAPTAIN
MARTHA
MARY

AVERY
ABBOTT



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CAPTAIN
MARTHA MARY



"I gotta get the kids cleaned up 'fore me an'
Jakey takes 'em on our weddin' trip."

CAPTAIN MARTHA MARY

BY
AVERY ABBOTT



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TO MY ACTIVE PARTNER

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Since "Captain Martha Mary" has already given to readers her earliest exploits, she is under obligation to the publishers of the "Metropolitan Magazine," and the "Red Book Magazine," whose courtesy makes it possible to continue her adventures in these pages.

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CHAPTER I

A NEST TO LIVE AT

TRANS-MISSISSIPPI
LADIES' AND GENTS' CLOTHING
NEW AND SECOND-HAND

THE board was of such proportions and hung so low that it came near to imperiling the heads of passers-by. Indeed, it was the red and yellow newness of this sign, rather than any consideration of the appertaining shop and stock, which decided the business career of Antonio Blatzfeld. He acquired as promptly as possible the entire magnificence; or, more correctly speaking, he advanced a month's rent, made a first payment on the stock, and then, with a lively and smiling countenance, hastened back to his family who were awaiting him at the Union Station.

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Early in the morning he had climbed down from the train, carrying in one hand a bulging telescope bag which bumped against his knees, and in the other a voluminous wicker basket covered with oilcloth. He was followed by an apathetic wife and a diminishing line of progeny. This domestic procession Antonio ushered into the waiting-room, where the members of it deposited their few greasy bundles of food and clothing and, apparently quite at home, ate, fought and slept, contentedly beguiling their father's absence, while Mrs. Blatzenfeld, with irresponsible frequency, nourished her latest-born.

At the end of the day, Antonio returned to them, greatly exhilarated. He breathed enthusiasm and spirituous liquors as he entered the room where the pawns of his parentage lay strewn upon the squares of the tessellated floor in the unguarded attitudes of sleep. Even Mrs. Blatzenfeld had succumbed and dozed in her chair with hanging arms, while the latest-born dangled perilously half off her 'p. Antonio seized

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the infant by the middle of his wearing apparel and folded him in a somewhat abrupt embrace. The baby choked, then settled into a blinking smile, rather obscured by a round fist punctuated with black dimples.

“It is just as if the city it had been made for us,” the father announced with loud complacency. “Already I have found a nest.”

“A nist of wot?” questioned his wife, even less awake than usual.

Antonio shouted with hilarity, rolling the squirming and gurgling latest-born between his palms like a ball.

“A nest of wot?” he repeated derisively. “A place to live at. A business in front and a house behint.”

With a fat smile Antonio marshaled the brood out of the railroad station; and, after a gratified survey of the immediate surroundings, led them down the least reputable of the adjacent streets.

Temporary hostelries swung their signs at intervals, while here and there a squalid shop displayed a rusty coat or a dangling

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pair of trousers alluringly before its door, and presently the family came in sight of the gayest sign of the entire quarter.

Mrs. Blatzenfeld looked at the board when it was proudly indicated by Antonio; she entered the shop and also looked at that. With the brood at her heels she inspected the battered counter, the broken show-case, the semi-opaque street windows, and said not a word. Notwithstanding the natural expansiveness of an Irish temperament, Mrs. Blatzenfeld was a silent woman. Years of experience with a volatile and loquacious husband had taught her the futility of speech. She looked at the three shelves filled with fly-specked boxes; she even lifted the covers of some of the boxes and looked at the emptiness inside; then she went out to the rear room where their household effects were piled in a heterogeneous heap in the middle of the floor, and where her husband was already seated in a one-armed rocking-chair which he had extricated from his newly purchased stock of goods.

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“ Antonio,” she asked hopelessly, “ sure an’ what is it you was meaning to sell?”

With the vapid dignity of the mildly intoxicated, her husband waved his hand toward a rusty stove, a cast-off trooper’s uniform hanging by a hook from the ceiling, some paper masks on a string, a pair of high boots and three battered hats.

“ This stock — it goes all with the place,” he announced with prodigal satisfaction. “ Besides, here is where I have one good idea. It is getting summer. Already it is becoming warm. We do not need so many clothings on us. I will myself take off my coat and vest. You,” he regarded for a moment his meagerly dressed spouse, “ you, I expect, can get along without something, if not from the outside, then from the underneath. The kids are needing not much at all. We can have quite a stock. We will put it in the window, and for the shelves I will get fresh boxes. By the fall we shall sell enough to buy much more, and we can then have winter clothings besides.”

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As a theory this was perfect, but it promptly received its first blow at the hands of the eldest of the brood, Martha Mary. She had been listening shrewdly to her father's system of finance, and she now faced him with decision.

"You can have my hat in there," she said, with a jerk of her bright auburn head toward the rear room. "'Tain't much good anyhow, since George Johnny slep' on it. You can have my underclothings, too; I don't care nothing about 'em. But I won't sell off my shoes and stockings. To go bare on your feet ain't ladylike."

"Well, well," mollified Antonio, having learned in this daughter's brief years an odd sort of respect for a character which was, in reality, much stronger than his own. "There will be enough, yet."

Indeed, Jacob Christopher and George Johnny, considering clothing a burden and a superfluity, gladly parted with as much as the requirements of civilization would allow. But a second insurrection took place when it became evident that the

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younger girl was expected to render tribute in the shape of a flannel petticoat.

This child, having early turned upon the world glances of enchanting if sometimes intermittent sweetness, had been christened by her father, Sunshine. Whereupon she had repaid him by exemplifying to the full, in her one small being, the Latin strain in his blood. With her growth she acquired a snarl of grape-black curls, eyes of blazing dusk, an amazing affinity for grime, and a temper which, either in love or anger, was cyclonic. George Johnny, two years her junior, blond, amiable and phlegmatic, she passionately adored. She threw herself upon him twenty times a day; often, it must be owned, scratching and biting, but more frequently with caresses, hardly less violent.

Now, while George Johnny watched her, blandly interested, she cast herself down on the floor, to indulge in what he called a "tankrum." For was not the petticoat in question, though old, of scarlet flannel? And was not its hue so dear to her little

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southern heart that gladly she would have worn it always outside, over her gray frock?

But the father could not be expected to take all this into account. "Tankrums," moreover, were a commonplace, and besides, he was at present absorbed in business. So with firm hands he turned over the yelling and kicking Sunshine, unfastened the gleaming brass button, which alone guarded the gay treasure, and wresting it calmly away, proceeded to the consideration of further stock.

The latest-born, not being yet of an age to appear often in public, was permitted to contribute more generously than any of the others toward setting his father up in business. The weather being, as Antonio had stated, very warm, the infant's wardrobe was reduced to the lowest possible terms and thereafter consisted simply of a change of flour-sacks. Pinned up in one of these, a rear view pronounced him in green letters "Pride of the West." The alternate garment, printed in red,

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declared him to be a "Happy Thought."

Antonio, observing this last, grinned. "It will do as well as any other," he said. "We will call him that." As the family increased, the father's interest in names was abating. Earlier, this had been an especial pride of his, but the christening of the latest-born was a minor consideration.

The present absorbing interest of the brood was the arrangement of their surrendered garments in a seductive window display. So adroitly did Antonio pluck up the flattened ribbons of Martha Mary's hat and so skilfully did he fold out of sight the rags and spots of Jacob Christopher's jacket that the original owners would gladly have regained their property. They scurried eagerly into the street to view their garments, as they were disposed in the front window, and they came to blows in a dispute as to which sacrifice would attract the first purchaser.

As a matter of fact, their father's coat was the initial sale and it went for such a good price — the buyer evidently being in

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need of altering speedily his outward appearance — that the proceeds enabled Antonio to become satisfactorily intoxicated. This was scarcely an episode in the family, long familiarity having dulled its significance; but Martha Mary, growing daily in keenness of perception, made at about this time a discovery.

“ Jake,” she said one day, while the two sat in the shade of a garbage barrel, catching flies and pulling off their heads, “ ma’s booze fightin’.”

“ What’s that?” questioned the less sophisticated younger brother.

“ Drinkin’, like pa. That’s what makes her sleep all the time and makes her so cross when she ain’t sleepin’. I guess drunk women is meaner ’n drunk men.”

“ Ma’s mean,” agreed Jakey, stung by the rankle of some recent injury.

“ She ain’t, neither. You must n’t talk like that about your ma,” reproved Martha Mary with inconsistent loyalty. “ She’s drunk now,” she calmly continued. “ I’m goin’ in and see what she’s doin’.”

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Their arrival in the rear room did not attract their mother's attention. She lay on the bed with the baby beside her and was occupied at the moment with trying to pour some last drops from a bottle into the child's open mouth. Poor little misnamed Happy was crying and choking, but stopped both abruptly as Martha Mary jerked him into her arms.

"You quit givin' him that," she ordered shrilly. "You're givin' it to him all the time. I seen you. It'll make him silly, Mis' Kelly said it would."

Mrs. Blatzenfeld was in no condition to argue concerning her neighbor's superior knowledge of the rearing of infants. She muttered thickly, glaring at her daughter, then lurched over on the bed in the stupor of drunkenness.

Jacob Christopher began to sniff. "I'm hungry," he complained, desirous of contributing his quota to the family discomfort.

"Shut up, Jake Blatzenfeld," snapped his sister. "Course you're hungry. So'm

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I. So 's ma, I s'pose, if she knew enough to know it. Come on, we 'll go set on Mis' Kelly's back step. Mebbe she 'll give us somep'n."

Mrs. Kelly, to whom Martha Mary seemed to pin her faith, possessed the distinction, rare in that vicinity, of having no children of her own to look out for. And though her indulgent generosity toward the children of others was likely to be spasmodic, she was a possible resource upon which the little Blatzenfelds had learned to count. Accordingly the two eldest now set forth by the shortest route, to be joined on the way by Sunshine and George Johnny, just returned from an inspection of the adjacent alleys with a view to discovering some rejected scraps of food. But very little that was eatable ever was rejected in this neighborhood, and the entire quartette proceeded to the friendly Mrs. Kelly's, who looked out of the door to find them ranged upon the step, apparently admiring the back yard.

“ You kids had anything to eat to-day? ”

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was her prompt and practical question.

“Oh, yes ‘m,” answered Martha Mary brightly, at which Jacob Christopher stared in disappointment.

“What’s yer ma doin’?”

“She’s asleep. We come away so’s not to disturb her.”

“Where’s yer pa?”

“He ain’t been home for two days. I guess he’s got a job.”

Mrs. Kelly grunted incredulously, then she took the day’s loaf from the shelf, where it lay between a kerosene lamp and a flat iron, cut off four thin slices, and, looking a bit regretfully at the remnant as she laid it back, handed the portions to Martha Mary.

“Oh, thank you,” said the elder sister in apparent surprise. “We’re so particular fond of bread we can eat it any time.”

“Well, hurry up an’ eat it then. If any more kids come, it’ll be lunches all around.”

It must needs have been a sudden arrival that could have surprised any vestige of that bread upon one of the Blatzenfelds.

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But the last scrap of food that Mrs. Kelly could manage to bestow, supplemented by a bit here and there from other neighbors, could not long keep the little household from the twisting pangs of hunger.

The expansive sign still swinging above the shop door might have indicated the gate of doom, so far as Antonio and his family were concerned. At least it very effectively marked the man's last flamboyant impulse toward responsibility. He now appeared only long enough to select what seemed the most negotiable object about the premises, and then vanished to reappear briefly upon the same errand, more unsteady and blear-eyed than before, but never ill-natured. It was left for his wife thoroughly to exemplify that phase of dissipation. These were precarious days for the brood, and they learned to anticipate with satisfaction the final stage which left their mother helpless on the floor.

One dull morning revealed even the sign gone; the next brought rumor of Antonio in jail. Mrs. Blatzenfeld did not doubt

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the truth of the news; in fact, it did not interest her particularly; she faced more pressing realities. There was nothing to sell, there was nothing to eat; that might have been borne; but there was nothing to drink, and that was not to be endured. She was dully conscious of the dependent brood, whom she regarded with smoldering animosity. It was a problem altogether too intricate for the befuddled mind of Mrs. Blatzenfeld, and she solved it by subtracting herself. What became of her no one was at the least pains to ascertain. The brood was troubled rather than bereft, and their small capabilities were completely occupied by their own immediate needs.

CHAPTER II

THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

EVEN the enterprising sun of an early May morning took some time to find its way into the one window of that room, back of the shop where the little Blatzenfelds were sleeping. The yellow beams lay first across Martha Mary's small, square, and rather dingy chin; then they outlined clearly the cheerful snub of her profusely freckled nose, and at last the warm rays fell on her eyes. Martha Mary put up her fists and rubbed those eyes with a weary little gesture which was appealingly childish, but the next moment she sat erect, and immediately her face took on an expression of mature concern. Crawling carefully over the tumbled rags which served as bedding, she reached across George Johnny and gave the still slumbering Jakey a pinch.

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“Ouch!” said Jacob Christopher promptly, and made a scramble in preparation for swift reprisal, but Martha Mary cowed him with serious mien and uplifted finger.

“Hush!” she admonished. “Come long outside.”

Once out, she closed the door with caution and entered upon her explanation, while the not yet fully awakened Jakey blinked at the ruts and garbage heaps of the alley, where the hot sun was already cooking up divers malodorous vapors.

“You get them kids awake,” began Martha Mary, “an’ there ‘ll be nothin’ but cryin’, same as there was all yesterday.” The freckled face sharpened at the recollection of yesterday’s trials. “Tell you what, Jake Blatzenfeld, you ‘n me’s got to hustle.”

“Hustle w’ot?” questioned the brother, in junior dependence.

“Hustle somethin’ for them kids to eat, first thing. Ain’t nobody else to do it. I was thinkin’ last night, w’en I heard the

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boys yellin' 'Yuxtry!' why can't you sell papers?"

"Aw, I dunno how!" deprecated Jacob Christopher.

"Know how!" His sister withered him. "You're the loudest yellin' boy I ever seen, an' you might just as well be yellin' 'Woild-Hoild-Bee-ur-News!'" (Here Martha Mary gave a subdued imitation of this accomplishment.) "Might as well be yellin' that, as to be yellin' nonsense out of your own head."

"Where'd I get the papers to yell?" questioned the still reluctant Jakey.

"That's just what I don't know nothin' about, but I'm goin' over right now to ask Mis' Kelly; she'll most likely know. Pa ain't a comin' back, nor ma ain't, neither. I'll bet you a dollar on that!" This last was stated with the triumphant assurance of one who lays down plenteous coin on a safe wager. "You stay right here; don't go stravagin' off now, 'cause if Happy wakes up he'll holler like anythin' for his milk. I won't be gone but a minute."

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She set off with wiry skips, hopping over tin cans and old bottles, her two red braids flapping on her flat little shoulders, until they switched around the corner that led to Mrs. Kelly's.

Popping in at her neighbor's back door she popped out her question at the same instant:

“Mis’ Kelly, where at do you git papers to yell?”

The languid Mrs. Kelly, still leaning her elbows upon a crumb-strewn table over a dirty coffee cup, looked around, wearily.

“Well, ain’t you the limit!” she observed, from the depths of her morning lassitude. “A body’d think you was stirred up of ginger an’ lightning.”

But Martha Mary was in no mood for neighborly badinage; her expression grew still more earnest.

“Where *do* they git ‘em, though? the kids that sells the papers? I want to git Jakey started right away. I got to!”

The anxious note in those last words pierced even the easy sloth of Mrs. Kelly.

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“ What’s the matter? Yer ma sick? ”

“ I guess so. I dunno. Leastways she ain’t there.”

“ Ain’t there! Since when? ”

Martha Mary stopped to consider. It seemed a long time since the family had been her responsibility. After a moment she said:

“ It was the night before yesterday when she went away. She didn’t come back.”

“ An’ yer pa? ”

“ He’s been gone a long time, already.”

Mrs. Kelly was fully roused now. “ For the love of Mary, ain’t that the limit! ” she cried, her voice vibrating with honest sympathy. “ An’ you kids a little nearer starved than what you’ve been any time yet! ”

Still Martha Mary’s pride did not quite desert her. “ The milkman give me a little milk for the baby,” she protested. “ It was most sour, but he took it, every speck. An’ we found quite a bit of bread an’

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things in the can back of the 'Quick Lunch.' "

Even the unfastidious Mrs. Kelly made a grimace at the thought of this source of supplies. "You better keep out of that. You 'll all get pizened," she admonished. "That old Brodky would n't throw out nothin' that was fit for a dog."

Martha Mary's face puckered and her eyes filled. Upon the table before her was still the heel of a loaf, some milk remained in the bottom of a yellow glass pitcher, and the air of the little room reeked with the smell of much-boiled coffee. So delicious was that odor to Martha Mary that it made her sick.

"You pore red-headed lamb!" exclaimed Mrs. Kelly, realizing the gravity of the situation and reaching, simultaneously, for the coffee pot and the milk pitcher. But Martha Mary intervened.

"If I could just have some milk for the baby, till Jakey can git into business."

"Now don't you be a fool, Martha Mary!" admonished the woman, as she

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held out a slopping cup of the gray mixture and began to pull off a portion of the bread. "Jest you git yourself outside of that, while I gether up a few things."

A relief expedition was soon under way, and when Jakey, still humping disconsolately on the back step, caught sight of an approaching coffee-pot grasped by Mrs. Kelly, he emitted a yell which augured a remarkable capacity for his future profession.

With a crust in one hand and some very small change in the other he was despatched to the nearest grocery and soon the entire brood was feeding voraciously on bread and coffee, while the baby attached himself with silent avidity to a sticky but succulent bottle. Meanwhile Mrs. Kelly offered counsel:

"Course you could apply to the Board of Charities," she commented, "but don't you never do it. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's bein' done good to. First thing they'd do would be to separate you all up. Send some of you way out in the country, like 's not, an' the rest to the Child

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Savin' Ins'tute. I put my Katy in *that* place, the winter Mike got his leg broke. They never give her a thing to eat but bread and milk, an' she most a year an' a half old! When I got her out she was pretty nigh starved for potatoes and meat an' somethin' solid. I fed her good strengthenin' food up to the day she died, an' I ain't got nothin' to blame myself for. No, sir! you keep clear of them charity guys, just as long as you can."

The little Blatzenfelds, gazing at their friend with their mouths full and their stomachs warm and cozy, were very willing to scorn assistance from all blundering and pride-bound organizations. And when Mrs. Kelly, getting to her feet, announced that she would make ready to go with Jakey upon his quest for employment, the two older children felt that success was assured.

Mrs. Kelly's toilet, for ceremonious occasions, consisted always of a shirt waist which made up in starch what it lacked in cleanliness. Her skirt remained the same, varied only by the differing arrangements

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of a huge safety pin at the back of the waist band.

That safety pin was an unfailing indicator of Mrs. Kelly's spiritual and financial state. Like mercury in a thermometer, it went up and down her spinal column, according to her mental temperature. When she was feeling altogether low she omitted the pin entirely and abandoned herself to a bagging hiatus in the equatorial regions.

But to-day, when the two were ready to depart, Martha Mary was encouraged to observe that the safety pin was at its top-most limit, so high indeed that Mrs. Kelly's skirt canted up in the back to reveal, above her low shoe, a hole in the heel of her stocking. However, since her belt had quite an elegant slant, Martha Mary deemed it best not to mention the hole.

The auguries proved correct. An hour later, Jakey, wearing a numbered badge, returned triumphant, a regularly appointed "newsy." When, on the next evening, he brought home twenty-seven cents, the Blatzfeld family basked in affluence. They

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had oyster stew for supper, two oysters in each portion, and three for Jakey because he was at work and needed strengthening food. Martha Mary remarked that they would n't have needed the soup so rich, but it was all right for once as a celebration. The elder sister had that sanguine temperament which is particularly strong on celebrations. When there was no especial occasion to be discovered she devised one, being fertile of expedients.

The following evening they celebrated again in honor of the fact that Martha Mary also had become a wage earner. This time they banqueted upon hot "weenies" and a dill pickle, of huge size and virulent complexion. "A dill pickle goes so far!" jubilated Martha Mary, munching a green and rubbery disk of the lauded fruit.

One circumstance alone marred her felicity; her new occupation would take her away from Happy during the greater part of each day. For Martha Mary was to be nurse to another baby of the neighborhood, a Hinkstein baby, whose mother

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wanted to go out to work. Jakey must therefore be on hand when his sister was not, and hours had been arranged accordingly.

It all looked very simple and felicitous; according to Mrs. Kelly, it was "a blessin' from Heaven," and certainly that shining dime each night must not be allowed to escape. So Martha Mary shouldered, very literally, her new responsibility, and she allowed no one to suspect how heavy and how ugly she thought that Hinkstein baby.

CHAPTER III

A VIGIL AND A VISION

FROM a sound sleep Martha Mary suddenly bobbed up to a sitting posture, her smarting eyes staring into the darkness and a sense of calamity heavy in her little breast. What had gone wrong? For a moment she could not remember, then the empty ache within spurred her tired senses. She was very hungry. They had gone without supper. In vain they had waited for Jakey, and Jakey had not come. Martha Mary had watched from the doorway until she grew afraid of the dark. Then, with the door fastened as securely as its rickety lock would permit, she had stared out of the grimy window, and every moment she had grown more anxious, and more empty.

Her one nickel had purchased milk for the baby, and as it grew late she divided

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the portion that was left between Sunshine and George Johnny. Thus they went to sleep, leaving Martha Mary to her lonely terrors. Finally, even she could no longer endure the vigil. Her arms and legs prickled, and her eyelids were closing of their own weight. She dragged herself over to the bed and knew nothing more about anything until she bobbed up again, with her whole small being wondering about Jakey. She had no idea what the hour might be. It was no darker than when she went to bed, but the feeling she had was a very late feeling, and all the sounds were late sounds, even to the far-off clang-ing of a trolley gong, which rang faintly and infrequently, because there were now so few teams or people in the streets. The gritty gnawing of a mouse only empha-sized the silence that had been filled when she went to sleep by the metallic jingling of an electric piano in a saloon two blocks away.

As Martha Mary listened to the lonely lateness of the night, a horrible fear began

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to drag at her. Jakey was dead. He must be dead. She knew it. With a sickening chill at the pit of her stomach, she saw him go under the wheels of a street car. Or perhaps it had been one of those ramping, honking automobiles. Whatever the cause, the result was the arms and legs of Jakey strewn the length and breadth of Farnam Street — ten times as many arms and legs as a boy of his normal structure could possibly have produced.

Despite her sureness of calamity, Martha Mary longed to go to the door and look out into the night. What relief, then, if Jakey, still intact, should be approaching! She dared not believe it; she had been disappointed too many times by other footsteps that had gone slouching emptily by into the unknown darkness of the street. So, in the terror that had finally come upon her, she crouched down in a strained posture, cowering and listening. The closed room was moistly hot, and with her choking anxiety, Martha Mary felt smothered.

But hark! What was that? There was

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a sound: the creak of a board outside, a touch on the door. The knob turned softly. Never before had Martha Mary known what a reassurance the nightly presence of the soundly sleeping Jakey had been. She would have screamed in spite of herself, but her tongue was dry and not even a whisper came.

Then, from without the door she heard a tone familiar:

“Lemme in!”

Like a coiled spring released, Martha Mary was erect and across the floor. She jerked back the rusty bolt, peeked through the crack, then flung the door wide.

“Jacob Christopher Blatzenfeld, where have you been?” With the words there surged over her a great wave of joyful relief, to be washed down immediately by a much greater wave of indignation.

Jakey’s entrance was sidewise and deprecating. He started toward the corner where the others lay asleep, but Martha Mary grasped his arm.

“I said, where was you?” she demanded.

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Her brother jerked away. "Show!" he ejaculated, defiantly. The dark and lonely homeward way had been almost too much even for Jakey.

"Show?" exploded his sister. "What show?"

"Orfume," the boy answered, trying to make his tone convey an extended familiarity with every form of entertainment. "All the kids goes, all the time. Binky he goes mos' every night. It's great!"

"Binky!" Martha Mary sniffed. "Ju have any supper?"

"Had nuff," Jakey evaded.

"Bet it was a lot!" his sister jeered.

"Was a-plenty," the boy righteously contended, and then he let slip a fact he had not meant to tell. "Me and Binky had pink ice cream, an' pop, an' cracker-jack!"

Ice cream? Cracker-jack? Jakey could not mean that. Jakey was only telling a lie. But no; there had been importance and pride in his voice. He did mean it: pink ice cream! That, and cracker-jack! And Martha Mary, at this very mo-

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ment, would have given anything for the stalest bun or the most impregnable doughnut which might have helped to assuage the ache and grind of emptiness.

Ice cream! Jakey had said it. Not merely ice cream, but *pink* ice cream! Very well, then; but that was not the important thing. Martha Mary knew the important thing. She put it into a sudden question:

“Got any money?”

“Yep,” replied Jakey, still righteously, and burrowed in the bottom of a trousers pocket.

Martha Mary took the coins which he handed her and spread them on her palm in the faint glimmer of electricity which filtered through the window. Three coppers! They could at least have rolls for breakfast. And then Martha Mary remembered the baby’s milk.

She put the pennies on the table and silently crossing the floor, lay down on the lumpy and disarranged bedding in the corner. Jakey, also, disposed himself for the night, which was a brief process in the Blat-

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zenfeld family, since disrobing was considered a futile and unnecessary performance. Neither of the children spoke. Jakey lay absolutely still, Martha Mary felt sure that he was asleep.

She was mad at Jakey, so mad that she was never going to get over it. She was madder still because he could go to sleep, — go to sleep right away, and not care one bit that he had spent all his money and had devoured pink ice cream, and popcorn, and cracker-jack, and had been to a show. She would be mad at Jakey all her life! She choked with the bitterness of her resolution and the hot tears smarted in her eyes.

What was that? Jakey was talking in his sleep! No, he was n't; he was awake and speaking to her. He did not seem to realize at all how mad at him she was.

“Gee!” said the boy's subdued voice, thrilling with remembrance. “Gee, Martha Mary, you 'd jus' orto seen that elephant! Right up on the stage he was, an' him big as a house! He could dance, that elephant could. Wa'n't nothin' he could n't do.

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He 'd walk around over the man an' never step on him, not once. If he had stepped on that man he 'd a squashed him flat, but you could see the feller wan't a mite afraid.

"There was more things, too. There was somethin' Binky called a 'skit.' It was a man a-paperin' a room. You never did see no such a dub as that feller was. We mos' died a-laffin' at him. He 'd get all tangled up in the paper, an' when he got a piece straightened out an' ready to slap onto the wall, he 'd fall off the stepladder into the paste bucket, an' there he 'd be, in a worse mess 'an he was before. You 'd jus' died a-laffin', Martha Mary. Binky an' me mos' did."

Martha Mary was silent, but Jakey, being quite lost in the gleeful treasure of his impressions, had still a breathless lot of wonderful things to tell.

"But the prettiest was a lady, a lady with a white horse. All white he was; not a speck on him, anywheres. And the lady she had on a dress all shiny green and gold, like fish scales all over, only brighter 'n

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a gold fish even. Her dress hung down in the back an' laid around on the floor."

"A train?" breathed Martha Mary.

"Yep, I guess it was a train. An' she an' that horse made pictures of themselves."

"Pictures?" Martha Mary questioned. "Pictures? how?" She was sitting up in the darkness and so was Jakey. They talked in violent whispers, across the slumbering barrier of Sunshine and George Johnny.

"Oh, they stood around and made 'em. I can't say it so's you'd know. You orto see it. I bet if I sell a lot of papers this nex' week, an' we don't spend much on eatin', we'd have enough money so's we could all go."

It seemed an inopportune time to urge further abstinence from food, but Martha Mary did not think of that. Before her spread the lure of unknown wonders. Her agile mind had already created marvels beyond anything Jakey had beheld. More than all was the reassurance of Jakey's

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magnanimity. He wanted her to go, too; he wanted them *all* to go.

"Will it be there yet next week?" she asked, in sudden fear.

"It's there all the time, only different. Sometimes it's better, Binky says. Sunshine an' George Johnny, they'd like it gran'. Mis' Kelly she'd keep the baby."

"Well, sir, we'll jus' do that!" joyously whispered Martha Mary. "You bet we jus' will. Now we better shut up a-talkin'. Mus' be mos' mornin'."

She lay down with resolution, but long after Jakey was breathing regularly, his sister was still wide-eyed. Her hungry little stomach and her hungry little brain were combining to keep her awake, but it was a pleasant wakefulness, full of dazzling fancies.

The hungry little heart was satisfied.

CHAPTER IV

BRASS BUTTONS AND FINE LADIES

THE wobbly craft of the Blatzenfelds seemed afloat in fair water. It was undeniably true that, according to their standards, the little family was on the edge of being comfortable, but there were shoals ahead. They struck Number One very shortly. Jakey sounded danger at night, on his home-coming.

“ W’ot do you s’pose that head guy says? ” he confided to Martha Mary, “ that boss w’ot gives out the papers? He says do I go to school? I says, ‘ not me! ’ An’ then he says I have to go. If I sells papers off ’n him, he ’s got to tend to me, so I go to school. He made like he was sore about it.”

“ Well, what for did you say, ‘ not me ’? ” snapped the sister. “ Why did n’t you say, not yet? It ’s always better when

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you say not yet, about most anything. You ain't got no — no — no respectableness."

Jakey, realizing his limitations, forebore comment, only asking meekly:

"What am I goin' to tell him when he comes at me again?"

"Tell him?" Martha Mary pondered deeply. "Tell him you're extry busy, whilst yer pa's out of town. Tell him that just as soon as yer pa gets back, you're a-goin' to start in."

"But you said pa was n't comin' back," demurred Jacob Christopher.

Martha Mary stuck out her chin, flounced across the floor to where Sunshine and George Johnny were having a mix-up, shook them apart, shook each one separately, and then, passing casually by the dejected Jakey, she deigned to remark:

"You don't *know* he ain't, do you? Well!"

But Martha Mary was permitted to use her own skill in steering around shoal Number Two. It arrived late one afternoon, buttoned rotundly into a blue coat, and it

BRASS BUTTONS AND FINE LADIES

was formally known as the truant officer. This ominous person inquired for the paternal Blatzenfelds.

“They’re out just now,” smiled Martha Mary, with a discerning eye to the brass buttons. “Won’t you take a chair?”

The portly gentleman glanced at the two chairs, one minus a back, the other lacking a leg, and not appearing to consider either of them worth the taking, continued to stand uncompromisingly by the door.

“Have you been attending school?” was his next question.

“I could n’t go to-day,” explained Martha Mary. “Ma ain’t been feeling real well.”

“You have a brother, have n’t you?” continued that relentless man. “Is he in school?”

“He ain’t got started yet,” admitted the girl. She was apparently very busy over the baby, shaking up his bedding and adjusting him with solicitude, though he had been making not the smallest disturbance. Now she lifted him from the perambulator

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into her arms and came to a stand before her visitor.

“ You see, we ain’t been moved here so very long,” she volunteered. “ I ’ve got another brother and a sister, too, both younger. They’re just crazy to go to school soon’s they’re old enough,” she finished, brightly.

“ Well, you tell your mother that you two older children must start right away, over here at Burbank, on D street; and you must attend regularly.”

“ Yes, sir.” Martha Mary’s tone was obedient and respectful. At the same time she tickled the baby and kissed him. He gurgled with laughter, throwing himself back in her arms until even the truant officer melted.

“ Nice baby,” he said, and smiled. “ Now don’t forget.”

“ No, sir,” said Martha Mary.

“ A p’liceman was here,” was her way of breaking the news to Jakey.

“ A cop? w’ot for?” Jacob Christopher was in dismay.

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“No, not a real cop; just a school p’lice-man.”

“Aw, I ain’t a-goin’ to no school.”

As suddenly Martha Mary tacked.

“Now Jacob Christopher Blatzenfeld! Do you want to grow up without a lick of education? I don’t guess you’d need to go all the time. Just a day or two once in a while, to be polite. That fat man looked real good-natured. I guess one or two days a week would do him. Somebody’s got to go; that’s a cinch. An’ when you’re away, I can skip over from Hinkstein’s every little bit and get a peek at the kids. Wisht she’d let me take ‘em over there, but I don’t dast ask her.”

Accordingly Martha Mary “skipped” between Hinkstein’s and her own abode, warily, lest Mrs. Hinkstein should discover her absences. Meanwhile Jakey enrolled himself as a pupil at Burbank. But even this strenuous effort to meet the municipal demands was unavailing.

Jakey had acquired a deep-seated distaste for school in the town of their earlier

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residence. He now developed an insatiable desire to tend the baby, and Martha Mary wearied of a combat which had to be fought anew every morning. Moreover, Happy was ailing, and Sunshine and George Johnny knew no arts to quiet him. One morning, after a long night which he had made intolerable by continued protests against some infant pain of uncertain location, he was fretting dismally in Jakey's arms, when there came a tap at the door.

Martha Mary stopped the clatter of her preparations for departure and uttered a warning, "Shut up!" The tap came again, polite but not to be denied. Instantly Martha Mary dived into the shop and closed the door after her, leaving a just discernible crack through which she whispered, "Now don't you tell nothin'."

Jakey stared in dismay; then, as his sister thrust out an arm and beckoned him to action, he gathered up Happy into a much soiled bundle, and went to the door.

It opened upon two ladies, suave and silken, the perfume of whose garments

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flavored oddly the kitchen's stale air. They entered with a gracious self-possession, having had previous experience as volunteer probation officers in this sort of visitation. Mentioning that they had chosen this time for their call as being most favorable for finding Mrs. Blatzenfeld, they were sorry indeed to hear that she was not at home. They had been more sorry to hear of Jacob's absence from school. The boy maintained a discreet silence, while he reflected upon the baby's inconsiderate conduct in choosing just this season to have a painful night. The ladies gracefully pursued their questions, to which Jakey answered, yes, or no, according as he fancied that he read their wishes; squirming, meanwhile, with such vigor as to endanger the safety of the baby.

His docility they found genuinely pleasing. Jakey did not look at all a bad boy; they agreed about that, but he was evidently very nervous. There must be a reason for the nervousness. One of the ladies felt sure she discovered the reason in the atmosphere of greasy cooking which pervaded

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the room. (Martha Mary's cooking was peculiarly productive of atmosphere.) They concluded that the boy was not properly nourished. It was a pity! Such a bright little fellow! They discussed him with a complete unconsciousness of his presence.

They also discussed the baby, Sunshine and George Johnny. The little girl had retired to a corner from which she glowered at the visitors, but George Johnny, in sweet placidity, leaned wide-eyed upon one lady's silken knee, not minding in the least that she spread her handkerchief under his hands. He would gladly have joined in the conversation, and would probably have contributed more than did Jakey. But when his lady questioned whether there were other children, and he responded, "Thither theeth thkipped intn the thtore," his unconquerable lisp effectually prevented any awkward disclosures, and Martha Mary remained undiscovered.

Finally the ladies rose and departed, with smiling leave-takings, shaking hands with

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Jakey and flapping George Johnny's limp and dingy little paw, while they assured the elder brother that they knew he realized now the importance of regular attendance at school; that they were positive he meant to be a very good boy. To all of which Jakey assented with a relieved, though somewhat sheepish, grin.

As the door closed upon the last smile, Martha Mary pirouetted into the room. "Snoopy, snoopy, snoopy!" she derided, mincing along with her dress lifted daintily. "Humph! I can smell 'em yet!"

"W'ot you skip out for?" demanded Jakey, with a sense of savage injury.

"Idiot! wo't for you s'pose? If these here swells are goin' to keep on droppin' in, I guess we 'll all skip out. Gee! I got to go. Mis' Hinkstein 'll be havin' a fit."

CHAPTER V

A FLITTING

THE premonitions of Martha Mary were not unfounded, though the next caller was hardly a swell. He was a much more serious menace in the shape of Eizenstein, the landlord, who took this unfortunate time to drop in and demand his next month's rent. Being offered, by Martha Mary, the ever useful excuse that her father and mother were out, he inexorably returned the next day; and, receiving the same answer, waxed threatening.

"Oudt, is it? Vell, that leetle game, it vill not vork. I ben coming again to-morrow, an' ven the money it iss not ready, effery cent, you vill be also oudt."

Eizenstein took a knife from his pocket and, opening the large blade deliberately, ran his dirty finger along it. Then he sliced a portion from a plug of tobacco,

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closed his knife with a snapping click and, giving the children a parting scowl, went scuffling away in his carpet slippers. Martha Mary, lugging Happy in her arms stood, meanwhile, in the doorway, the two brothers and the smaller sister watching their departing caller over the top of the baby's head.

When he had disappeared from sight, big sister transferred her burden to the arms of Jacob Christopher. "Here, you mind him an' the kids. I got to go away — on business," she completed importantly.

An hour later the stomachs of the hungry brood gave an added twinge of expectation, as Martha Mary's dilapidated shoes came slapping up the back steps.

"I 've found the Jim-dandy place, Jake," she exulted. "It 's that little house we saw when we was down coal pickin' by the railroad. Nobody ain't lived there lately. I ast a woman. We 're goin' to move, straight off."

She began to fly about the place, catching up here and there an article which the father

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and mother had not thought salable. Everything she flung at a pile she was accumulating in the middle of the floor. This was a good game. Sunshine and George Johnny fell to, and threw things in various directions with enthusiasm. Jakey put the baby down with the other household necessities and made for the outside.

“I ’ll go tell Mis’ Kelly,” he called back.

“No, you don’t, Jake Blatzenfeld,” commanded his sister. “You come ’ere. We ain’t goin’ to tell Mis’ Kelly nor nobody, an’ have that dirty old Eizenstein comin’ after us. We ’re goin’ to lead a better life, like pa was always talkin’ about. I guess we ’re ready to pack now.”

She whirled to the middle of the floor the old perambulator, and commenced bundling portions of the heap into it. The foundation was laid with some remnants of dirty bedding; broken dishes and unwashed cooking utensils were wedged about; in the midst, on a sodden pillow, she planted the baby and surveyed this ark of salvation. “ ’Tain’t quite full,” she decided as she stuck

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an empty bottle, a broken egg-beater, a discarded corset, and the handle of a featherless duster into each of the four corners. Then she grasped with a firm hand the wrecked green parasol, which dangled like a withered burdock leaf at the back of the vehicle.

“There’s one thing we don’t need,” she declared with emphasis, as she flung it disdainfully aside. “Now come on, all of you. You kids take as much as you can carry of what’s left, and we’ll move.”

It required a steady hand to guide the overloaded perambulator down the back steps, but Martha Mary combined the skill of experience with the strength born of a high emprise. By the time she had bumped the vehicle and the sprawling Happy successfully to the ground, the rest of the family rallied around her and she headed the retreat down the alley; the others, with their spoils, stubbing single file behind.

Jacob Christopher bore aloft a blue glass lamp, very smoky of its chimney and seepy of its bowl, but still containing a useful por-

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tion of reeking oil. George Johnny, less mature in his judgment, carried flapping against his knees a large and gaudy lithograph, whose representation of crisp brown rolls and pink ham had inspired the adoring ardor of his empty little stomach, leaving him oblivious of the long-necked bottle which was the center of the pictured repast. Trailing behind was Sunshine, betraying her feminine taste by clutching to the front of a little apron glazed with dirt, a nosegay of tattered and faded paper flowers.

“ W’ot in the dickens do you an’ George Johnny expect to do with them things?” snapped Martha Mary when, feeling safe from pursuit, she slackened her pace to let the rear guard catch up. “ Never mind,” she promptly comforted, as signs of inconvenient woe began to appear upon two tired and dirty little faces (Happy had been for some time wailing exasperatingly), “ don’t cry now. Them things ’ll help to make it look homelike. I ’m goin’ in here an’ borrow some matches off this cigar store,

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an' then we 'll hurry up. It 's gettin' late."

Once more on its way, the straggling line passed through rapidly darkening streets. They stumbled over the rotting blocks of cedar pavements, where ill-smelling puddles, reflecting the infrequent electric lamps, shone bluish-white, like pieces of metal. The lights only served to emphasize the ever-increasing squalor, and presently the children came out upon a partially open space, with a few strange shanties cowering along the railroad tracks; crazy structures, cobbled together out of the flotsam of the turbulent city. In two or three of these hovels, sickly lights were beginning to glimmer.

" If only somebody ain't rented our house a'ready," observed Martha Mary anxiously. But no gleam shone from the ruinous little shack to which the elder sister guided her family. She pushed open the dragging door and they trooped after her, unafraid, into the dim and musty interior, their bare feet pat-patting over the worn boards.

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“Here we are!” she cried jubilantly, as she struck a match. “Bring the lamp here, Jakey.” They set up their smoky altar light upon an old box in one corner, after which Martha Mary hunted out a tin can from beneath the sleeping baby, and sharply bidding them all stay right where they were till she returned, she whisked out of the door. She came back with the can slopping over with water, produced from some place of concealment a greasy paper sack, and emptied its contents into a vegetable dish. Supper was served. The food was a conglomerate mass of scraps, but the children set about fishing contentedly for the most recognizable bits, and eating with sounds of greedy zest. Martha Mary awakened Happy by thrusting into his mouth a small, soft portion and gave him some of the liquid from the can to drink.

During their sister’s absence the family had been settling. Jakey had lifted the baby and the bedding into a much-mixed heap at the side of the room. From a broken jug Sunshine’s pink paper flowers

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bloomed rakishly. George Johnny had found a rusty nail in the crumbling plaster upon which to impale his lithograph, and the crisp, brown rolls, the pink ham and the lurking golden bottle glowed in complacent color upon the supper of broken leavings.

“Ain’t this the Jim-dandy place?” Martha Mary exulted again, as she looked about the dirty room, whose half-lit corners were filled with the discarded rubbish of former occupants. She seemed too much elated to eat her share of the food, which she was portioning out to the others while her tongue ran gaily on. “Here’s where we can house-keep and nobody to bother us. *I’m* the mother o’ this housekeepin’, an’ you’ve got to be the father, Jakey Blatzenzfeld.” She surveyed Jacob Christopher with an estimating eye, never having considered him before in this capacity. “I wisht you was bigger for a father. A bigger father looks better; a bigger father *is* better.”

She shook out the end of a ragged comforter with a flap that sent drab wads of

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cotton flying, and spread it along the wall. “ You, Sunshine an’ George Johnny, come ‘ere an’ lay down.”

The two viewed these preparations for the night, then the boy raised his voice in protest. “ I’m hungry yet,” he howled.

“ Now, now,” expostulated Martha Mary, at the same time hustling them briskly toward their couch, “ you ain’t neither hungry, and if you are, you won’t know it after you get to sleep. You lay down an’ be good an’ to-morrow, or mebbe the day after, Jakey an’ me ’ll take you on our weddin’ trip.”

“ Weddin’ trip?” echoed the newly appointed father, whose duller wit lagged ever in the wake of Martha Mary’s skipping fancy.

“ Yes, weddin’ trip,” she snapped with truly conjugal asperity, adding in a lowered tone: “ The kids ’ud like it fine, an’ they got to have somep’n to look forward to.”

But even the anticipation of such an unique pleasure was hardly sufficient to sustain the Blatzenfelds through the days that

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followed. Wan days they were and empty; the little Blatzenfelds were often empty, too, and growing every day more wan. Jakey was less resourceful than boys of his age who have spent all their brief years in the city. As a "yeller" of papers he fully justified Martha Mary's faith, but as a seller he was continually outdone by his shrewd and wily competitors. The small coins he gathered were small, indeed, to meet the needs of a family.

It was not possible for the elder sister to be long from home. Once she earned a nickel by minding a baby while its mother went with another child to a doctor. Now and then a scrap of food came from some of the neighbors in the huddling shanties, but they had pitifully little to give. Martha Mary talked a great deal now about the wedding trip. Sunshine and George Johnny submitted to having their faces washed to make ready for it; they went to bed early that they might wake up in time to start; they stopped crying on instant peril of losing it forever. Martha Mary

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kept it dancing ahead of them, a shining *ignis fatuus*; even Jacob had come almost to believe in it.

But Martha Mary's little face had grown old.

CHAPTER VI

TREASURE TROVE

“**W**OILD-HOILD, Bee ur News!” rasped the husky voice of Jakey Blatzenfeld. A diminutive gray figure, in the gray rain, he stood at the bank corner on the glistening walk, and tried his chanting call in different keys, but always it proved only a futile croak, quite undiscernible above the noises of the street. There was the wet clok-clok of hoofs on the shiny pavements; there was the clangor of the car gongs; there was a vicious snapping and tearing of violet fire along the dripping trolley wires; there was a spluttering dash from under whirling wheels along the rainy tracks; there were churnings and snortings and yowlings of automobiles whose fat tires scuddled up a slush of mud and water.

It was a rainy June and Jakey standing at his post soaked to the skin in the chill

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showers had taken a cold which promptly attached itself to his overworked vocal organs. His yell, that one pride and accomplishment, was gone. To be sure, he still disposed of papers. The bundle of freshly printed sheets under his arm, his numbered badge, his appealing size and his good-natured, wistful little face, conducted his business for him, almost as effectively as his vociferous shoutings had done. But Jakey's was the soul of the artist and the zest of his work had vanished. He drooped like a fledgling rooster, who has swelled himself out for a cock-a-doodle-doo! and finds himself emitting a ludicrous and grating squawk.

In impotent mortification Jakey scuffed along the street, and as he returned to his station close to the curb, not even looking up for possible patrons, his eye caught a gleam under the sodden trash in the gutter. Listlessly he stepped down and kicked the rubbish with his muddy toes. The next moment he had made a sudden grab and then scuttled for a sheltering doorway.

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Here he held his hand under his jacket and looked again. It was! It *was* a watch! Round and golden, with the slender thread of a dull metal chain still hanging broken from its ring, the timepiece shone in his eyes as big as a full moon. With trembling fingers he tied the chain together, ducked his head through the loop and slid the watch into his trousers' pocket. Then he gathered up his slab of papers and went back to his corner in a daze.

“Got a *News*, kid?” asked a man’s voice above him.

“Nope,” answered Jakey.

“Yes, you have. You little blockhead!” and a hand twitched a paper off the top of the pile and held out a penny.

Jakey accepted the copper and idly held it in a lax hand. What was a copper when a gold watch was ticking against his leg? He pressed his palm tight over its round hardness, put his hand in and felt its smooth case, held open his pocket and looked within, till he caught the yellow shine, then he started down the street. He would turn

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in what remained of his papers; it was too late, anyhow, to make sales. Ten minutes after he climbed on the back platform of a passing car. The conductor would order him off as soon as he got around to it, but by that time Jakey would be several blocks nearer home. Either through kindness or carelessness the conductor did not look at him until he swung off a few squares from his own corner.

Martha Mary saw him coming, and fears of a lost job assailed her. "How'd you get back so early?" was her anxious greeting.

Excitement was spurring Jakey's brain to unusual activity. He executed a grand flourish.

"Early?" he questioned with an air of elaborate nonchalance to which his hoarseness gave a most weird effect. "Is it early? Now leave me take a look at the time!"

He tried to draw out the watch with the careless ease of habit, but only succeeded in getting hold of the chain. So, instead

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of regarding the face gravely, as he had intended, he held up his treasure dangling, and grinned at Martha Mary.

She made one dash and grabbed it.

“Jee-rusy-lam-gosh!” she ejaculated. “Who give it to you? Where’d you git it? Is it real?”

“Real! ‘Course not. I got it off ‘n a prize box of gum drops.”

“’Tis, too, real!” Martha Mary was holding it to her ear while George Johnny and Sunshine pulled at her arm and clamored for a nearer view.

“Where *did* you git it, Jakey?” she pleaded.

“I picked it out ‘n some dirty papers in the gutter. Here, leave me have it back!”

But his sister had looped the chain over her neck and now paced tiltingly up and down the floor, humming a tune, while she gazed first at the back of the watch, then at its face. Suddenly her mood changed.

“Did anybody see you git it?” She stopped to peer solicitously into Jakey’s face.

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"Naw, they did n't." The boy waxed belligerent. "You give it here now!"

The girl was unheeding. "How much do you s'pose it's worth? I bet it was awful costly."

Such observations did not meet with Jakey's favor. "I ain't a-goin' to sell it," he whined, and being half sick from his cold and wholly exasperated by his sister's behavior, his exhilaration dropped from him and he began to cry.

"Bawly ba-aby!" mocked Martha Mary, then relenting suddenly, "Here, take yer ole watch. I gotta go get somepin' for supper. D'ye make anythin' to-day?"

Jakey turned out his pockets and Martha Mary departed for the grocery, but before she left she halted in the doorway to issue orders.

"You, Sunshine and George Johnny, don't - you - never - tell - hope - to - die - an' - spit, that Jakey never found nothin', nowheres. An' you, Jake Blatzenfeld, you put that watch up on the shelf under that washbasin, or before I git back the kids 'll

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smash it, or the baby 'll swallow it, or you 'll lose it somewhere yourself. An' then you 'll have to go to jail."

With which comforting prophecy concerning the results of wealth, Martha Mary banged the door behind her.

That night, for the first time, the little Blatzenfelds experienced the uneasiness which accompanies possessions. What if the watch should be stolen! They hid it under a snarl of rags in the corner, and at once imagined something suspicious in the arrangement of those rags, something which would attract the most stupid of burglars immediately. But when they had stowed it away in a hole under the floor, they were no better satisfied. Finally Jakey insisted upon taking it to bed with him, putting it inside his shirt and folding his arms tightly across his chest to insure against robbery.

Martha Mary did not long combat this project, but she kept awake until the folded arms dropped with slumber. Then she secured the prize herself and essayed to sleep on it. She was not comfortable. It was

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astonishing what a big lump the watch made, in a bed not remarkable for smoothness. But the girl finally succumbed to sheer weariness, only to start awake again from terrifying dreams, and to find that Jakey, also, was tossing and talking in his sleep. She sat up and looked at him as he lay in the blue gleam of a distant arc light which pierced the window. About his neck was a rag soaked in kerosene which, despite his protests, she had tied on him for the benefit of his cold.

“I bet that coal oil is bitin’ somepin’ fierce,” she thought, as she watched him twist and turn. Sighing wearily she lay down again, but fell asleep only to waken and search once more for the watch, which seemed to go burrowing about like a mole, the moment her hand was not on it.

It was with great reluctance, the next morning, that Jakey relinquished his expectations of wearing the watch. Where was the use of a thing like that if you could n’t take it with you to dazzle your associates? He and Martha Mary quarreled on that

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point until he departed, vanquished but sulky. He returned in a still worse humor.

“Wo’d I tell you, now! That watch’s gone been advertised. The kids was readin’ in the paper. ‘Gee!’ says Binky, ‘lost ’tween 16th and 17th streets, an’ me a-goin’ up an’ down there every day!’”

“An’ you tole, I bet!”

“Naw, I never. W’ot was the use, with me nothin’ to show? They’d ‘a’ give me the laugh on that. Here’s the paper where it says about it.”

Martha Mary spelled out the brief notice, one word at a time, until she came to the last. “Whoopee! Jakey, listen at that. Fi’ dollars ree — ward! Fi’ dollars!”

“Yep, I know,” said Jacob Christopher condescendingly. “But Binky he said fi’ dollars wa’ n’t nothin’ fer a watch. He said some watches was worth twenty-fi’ dollars. He said as how if he found that watch he was goin’ to sell it an’ buy a pop-corn wagon. He said he bet he could git a wagon with a horse, maybe. He said he could git one with a gong, anyhow.”

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"Yep, I bet we could. We could run a pop-corn wagon. You could drive an' make the gong go, an' I could shake the corn. The kids could ride along. Would n't that be great?"

"You bet! Le's go sell it now. I bet Dittenheimer'd buy it. Down where it says, 'Joolery an' House Furnishin's'." Jakey was on fire with anticipation.

But something deterred Martha Mary.

"He'll ask where we got it, that's what he'll do! Then what ye goin' to say?"

"Aw, I'll tell him paw guv it to me."

"He'd b'lieve that, would n't he?" sneered the sister. "Dittenheimer knowed paw."

"Well, le's go ask *somebody*."

Martha Mary regarded him with the long-suffering asperity of superior years. "I never did see no such a boy! I bet you'll bust plum wide open if you don't git a chanc't to show off that watch. Can't you be satisfied to *own* a gole watch an' chain? It's more 'n mos' kid's got."

No, Jakey was far from satisfied; but

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compared with Martha Mary's state of mind his mental attitude was peace itself. Long after he was asleep that night his sister lay awake smothered by a black and sickening sense of guilt; that unreasoning, rayless terror known only to childhood.

For the first time Martha Mary missed her mother. Yet it was not at all the listless, silent, drink-sodden woman who had deserted her children, of whom the girl was thinking. She could quite well remember when mother had been different. Before poverty and drink, the drain of child-bearing, and the foolish improvidence of Antonio had put upon her the stamp of utter hopelessness, Mrs. Blatzenfeld had been used to take thought of her little ones. Martha Mary's earlier years had known motherly care and instruction, and it was those years which now bore fruit in a vivid conviction of wrong-doing.

The watch was theirs no longer. It was the property of that unknown "A. R. Q." who had advertised. Why had Binky ever nosed out that mean little item in the paper?

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If they had sold the watch at once it would have been all right, but if they sold it now, they would be stealers. That word brought with it a troop of fears sufficient to keep Martha Mary rolling back and forth in the tumbled bedding till she was quite worn out.

But in spite of weariness her eyes opened again with the first grayness of morning. Then, when her distress had taken shape once more, she shook Jakey awake.

“Jakey, git up here! We got somepin’ to do. You know what’s goin’ to happen to us, when we don’t git that watch back right away?”

“Quit! Lemme be!” The boy struck at her and rolled out of her reach, closing his eyes tighter, but she pursued him.

“The cops’ll be after us. The cops, d’ye hear?”

Well she knew the power of that word with her brother. He struggled to a sitting posture, gouging his eyes malevolently with black fists.

“Wha’ssa matter? What cops? What

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you talkin' 'bout anyhow?" he mumbled.

"'Bout that gole watch an' chain. Can't you see that if 'A. R. Q.' is a-advertisin' for it, he wants it, an' he's going to fin' out where it's at? Somebody saw you pick that up."

"Naw, they didn', neither!" interrupted the boy.

"Course you didn' see 'em saw you, but they saw you all the same. They must of, with all them people on the streets. An' that 'A. R. Q.' he's goin' to fin' us and fin' that watch, an' then we'll all have to go to jail fer keepin' it."

"Aw!" Jakey strove to make his tone contemptuous but his sister's prophecies were telling on him. She pursued her advantage.

"Yessir, most likely they'll be here after us to-day."

Jakey weakened. "I'm sick of the durn ole watch, anyhow. I'll take it back an' lose it where I foun' it. Let Binky fin' it ef he wants to. He's a-huntin' it. An' then see what the cops'll do to him!"

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"That'd be just like you; go throwin' away a perfectly good watch. We'll answer that advertisement, of course, an' git that fi' dollars."

"All right," acquiesced Jakey with an alacrity equal to his former reluctance.
"How we goin' to do it?"

Martha Mary considered.

"W'y jus' do it. On the paper it says, 'A-dress "A. R. Q.," care Worl'-Heral'. That means write a letter."

"You goin' to write a letter, Martha Mary?" Jakey's tone was awed.

"Course I be. You come 'long an' help, 'fore the kids wakes up."

While the morning light was growing steel-blue in the room, the two children smoothed out a portion of a paper sack, on one side of the table, and set to work with the stub of a pencil contributed from Jakey's pocket.

"*Yu kin fine yer wach,*" scrawled Martha Mary, with great labor, gripping the pencil with rigid fingers and sticking out her tongue.

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"Where kin he fin' his watch, Jakey?" she stopped to ask.

"On me," said Jacob, cheerily. "I'll wear it."

"He'd fin' you easy, would n't he? An' that watch 'd be on you a long time, onc 't you got in the middle of a bunch of newsies."

That last statement struck Jakey forcibly. He had one of his infrequent ideas.

"Tell you what, I'll leave it by Mr. Carey. He's cashier in that Union Clothing Store, by the bank. He buys a 'News' off me every night, an' he most allus gives me a nickel. He's white, Mr. Carey is."

Martha Mary considered. "Yep, I guess that 'd do." She resumed her labor.—"at yunyon stor." She looked up, "Now when 'll we say? He's got to git the letter first. To-morrow 'll be time enough. To-morrow 's Saturday, no, Friday."

The pencil started off again.—"frydy nun ast fer J. Blatzenfeld."

Reflectively Martha Mary ran the pencil

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down her tongue, making a black line along its redness. Then she wrote again.

“Wot ye tellin’ ‘im now?” inquired Jakey suspiciously.

His sister read with pride:

“*p s don’t fergit the reeward 2 purzent dizcount fer kesh.*”

“Wot’s dizcount?”

“It’s pay w’en ye git it. Don’t ye know? Pa allus put a sign like that on things in the winder. Don’t you leave that ‘A. R. Q.’ have no watch neither, till he comes across with the cash.”

The preliminaries went through as planned, and on Friday morning Jakey had at last his proud desire; he wore the watch down to business. Made wary by his sister’s repeated injunctions, he dared not take it from concealment but called his papers unremittingly while he kept one hand tight over the lump in his pocket. Never had any morning seemed so long to Jakey. Alternately he shifted his eyes from the clock in the post-office tower to the entrance of the Union Store. Surely Mr. Carey was

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not often so late. But at last the well-known figure in the smart gray suit separated itself from the morning crowd of passing workers and pushed through the swinging doors into the store. At once Jakey started to follow and immediately encountered temptation in the shape of Binky.

“How many’d ye sell, kid?” was Binky’s hail. “Mos’ time to quit.”

“Is it?” observed Jakey, grandly. “Don’t believe it is by *my* time.” Like a flash he pulled out the watch and let it glitter before the astounded eyes of Binky.

“Here, you! Where’d you git that?” yelled the older boy, and he made a lunge for capture, but Jakey had chosen his place. He dodged through the doorway of the Union Store, and not until he had shoved the watch under the cashier’s window and into the hands of the mildly surprised Mr. Carey, did he look back to find that Binky had prudently stopped without, and now, through the glass of the door, was making faces intended to be paralyzing.

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It was fortunate for Martha Mary that she remained in ignorance of all this. As it was, the day taxed her patience to the breaking point. She could have declared that on no other day had Sunshine and George Johnny ever bethought themselves of so many iniquitous occupations. And, surely, never had poor, tiny Happy cried so unremittingly. She fed him and walked with him, wheeled him and trotted him, then fed him again, but nothing stilled his wailing.

Martha Mary was near to tears herself, and her back and arms were aching with a red-hot pain when, at last, she could go out and sit upon the step to watch for Jakey. There was a boy coming, she caught a glimpse of the hurrying figure in a gap between two buildings, but it was not Jakey. It was a well-dressed boy, though something in the way he scrambled along with ducked head and swinging arms reminded her of her brother. Now the boy rounded the corner, caught sight of her and advanced with strange whoops and cavortings. It

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was Jakey, sure enough, but Jakey in the transforming glory of a new blue suit.

“ Gee! ” cried Martha Mary, “ ain’t you the dead swell! Where’d you git ‘em? ”

“ Off that lady, ‘A. R. Q.’ ” Jakey straddled about with his hands in his pockets, displaying himself at all angles. “ ‘A. R. Q.’ wa’ n’t no man; it was a lady, a awful nice lady, too. I tell you, she was glad to git that watch back. She said her husband gi’n it to her, an’ he was dead now.”

“ So it was her gi’n ye the clo’es? Ain’t that fine! Where’s the fi’ dollars? ”

“ Fi’ dollars! W’y that’s wot bought the clo’es.”

Martha Mary felt something within her sink, suddenly, but Jakey went blithely on. “ They was cheap, too. They’re a-sellin’ ‘em out extry special. The lady an’ Mr. Carey they both said they wanted to see me spend my money useful an’ they fitted ‘em right on, then. Don’t they make me look the gay gazabo? ”

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“ Yep,” his sister’s tone was dull.
“ Where’s yer ole ones?” she queried.

“ Wot did I want o’ them ole rags? I lef’ ‘em at the store.”

Martha Mary regarded her brother’s greasy cap, his still greasier shirt and his bare and muddy feet in contrast to the blatant newness of his other attire. She thought of the scantily fed children asleep within, of her own tired arms and aching back and of the doctor she had thought might help to make Happy well again. Five dollars had seemed capable of purchasing almost anything they might ever need, and now there was to be no five dollars. She did not know that she was confronting the eternal masculine, but the lump which rose in her throat was so big that she got up quickly from the step that Jakey might not see how hard the lump was to swallow. And when she answered her brother, it was the eternal feminine which spoke for her.

“ That suit,” said Martha Mary, “ sure is awful handsome.”

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"Yep," agreed Jakey. "An' that lady took my badge number. She said I could count on hearin' from her again, maybe. She said there wa' n't *many* boys would of returned that watch, same as me."

CHAPTER VII

AN ADDITION TO THE FAMILY

TWO small and anxious countenances were peering over the brink of the ditch, while the source of the disturbance renewed his efforts, both muscular and vocal.

“A dog, Georgie! A little baby dog! A white, little baby dog!” cried Sunshine in an ecstasy of excitement, though the last added appellation was rapidly becoming inappropriate, through the puppy’s repeated backslidings into the mire. “You stay right here, Georgie, and I’ll git him out.”

Sunshine spoke with a confidence not unfounded, for of this ditch she and George Johnny knew thoroughly both the outs and the ins. There was a certain spot where a portion of the bank had crumbled, leaving a ledge which it was possible to traverse to the bottom. Sunshine had made the trip

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before, through a pure lust of adventure, and now she started down without a thought but helpfulness.

The white baby dog began to whimper confidently, at the same time wading and waddling valiantly to meet the relief expedition, and by the time Sunshine was on his level she was able to pull him into her arms; but the ascent was more difficult. Even a small puppy, when he is slippery with mud and wriggling with rapture, is an armful for five years old, but George Johnny, above, was not without resource. He lay on his stomach and stretched down eager arms.

“ Puth ‘im up! ” he shouted. Sunshine, almost spent, made a final effort. George Johnny caught one of the dog’s legs; there was a general scramble, a mixture of exclamation both human and canine, and George Johnny and the puppy were rolling on the bank, leaving Sunshine to finish her ascent in more deliberate security.

“ Ain’t he sweet! ” gurgled Sunshine.

“ Fweet! ” chorused George Johnny in the most sincere acquiescence, though in-

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deed the reek of the dog's late experience was still upon him. But his rescuers did n't mind that; bless you, no! The fetid breath of the drainage ditch was their normal atmosphere. Other children might have died of it, they lived immune. Since their removal to the sparsely settled river-flat the days of Sunshine and George Johnny were uneventful even to monotony. And this particular afternoon was more than usually dull, because Martha Mary had been absent taking care of a family of small children whose mother was appearing against the father in police court. So the advent of the puppy was not an incident, but an epoch.

Yet as the day waned, both children grew sober in expectation of what Martha Mary would say. The hours had been one long romp; even the necessity of sharing their lunch with the dog was robbed of any seriousness by the puppy's unfamiliarity with solid food. Though he whined often and emptily, he managed only a small portion of bread and syrup, and fortunately it did

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not occur to them to give him the baby's milk. In this evidence of a delicate appetite the children found encouragement, for certainly Martha Mary would recognize the advantage of that; they were concerned all the same, to see her coming.

There she was, down the dry and dusty length of the parched street, near the place where the broken pavement came to an end; a small figure with thin little legs below a short dress. She walked slowly along, her body somberly outlined against a background of tumbling blackness — the sluggish, sooty flood from the thicket of smoke-stacks over yonder, among the jumbled mass of distant packing houses.

Instantly, as their sister came into view, Sunshine grasped the hand of George Johnny, for without that precautionary link they never ventured beyond their own precincts. And now, while Martha Mary was gradually approaching, they started toward her on a lively trot. After them came the puppy, blundering, falling over his own paws, but making good time, nevertheless,

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and emphatically prominent by reason of his piercing protests against being left.

This would never do. Sunshine halted, and suddenly realizing that there was no use going to meet trouble, she fiercely commanded the dog to go back. He was charmed at being waited for, prostrated his soft little body upon her bare feet and licked the dust from her toes, while Sunshine giggled with delight at the funny warm feel of it, and Martha Mary was looking just as they had known she would — a good deal interested and rather cross.

“Whose is it? Where did you get it?” she questioned. The puppy, by way of introducing himself pleasantly, got between her feet and nearly brought her to the ground before she had him disentangled. Meanwhile, the children were vocal.

“Can we keep him? *Can't* we keep him? We got him in the ditch. He likes us awful well.”

By this time, they had all reached their own domain, where Martha Mary dropped upon a box outside the door, while children

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and puppy cast themselves upon her. She rolled the little animal over with her foot and laughed like the child she was; then she said, "What you s'pose we 're goin' to feed him?"

"Oh, bread and syrup," assured Sunshine. "He likes it dandy, but he only eats just such a *little* bit!" she added with early wisdom.

"He 'll be an awful nuisance and he 'll eat a lot," asserted Martha Mary dubiously.

The two eager faces looking up at her, sobered on the instant; only the puppy remained ecstatic, fiercely worrying the hem of Martha Mary's dress, as if it were not already much too worn and frayed to be properly called a hem. She pushed him away, got up, and went into the house to hang over the cab where Happy lay asleep.

"You can keep him a while, to-night anyway, if nobody don't come for him," she called back, as she unwrapped a stale loaf she had brought with her and began preparations for supper.

So the puppy stayed, and had conferred

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upon him the name of Mark, in honor of the butcher's boy who once gave him a bone.

Mark early learned the use of bones; indeed he developed a capacity for food which became rapidly inconvenient, yet not surprising, since his body was long and barrel-shaped, with no legs to speak of, and completed by a futile tail and a heavy-jawed head. But Mark was not depressed about his looks, for there were four children to whom he was beautiful. By day he stretched himself out in the shade, by night he slept at the children's feet, and Martha Mary felt much safer about leaving the younger ones alone, now that Mark was showing signs of having developed a sort of sagacity.

He seemed almost to understand when Martha Mary contracted a severe cold. She had really no leisure for such indulgences and it racked her so sorely that it seemed doubtful at times whether she ever would get over it by the natural method.

Mark stood about with the children to

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watch her when she coughed, and looked sad with his eyes and glad with his tail, thus being able to convey condolence and encouragement simultaneously. So she did pull through after a while; she had to, and soon she was flying about again with her former snap and enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, Mark had almost ceased to be a baby dog, having matured rapidly under necessity. He seemed to have no idea when to stop growing and it was now that he manifested his lack of human intelligence. Jakey's earnings did not increase as they had hoped, so the children really tried to eat sparingly, and even Sunshine endeavored to conceal from Martha Mary the half-filled condition of her little stomach; Mark alone was openly ravenous. He ranged the neighborhood, the target of brooms and brick-bats, but the locality was not prolific of edible garbage, and Mark's barrel sides were growing flat.

Then came the terror of the dog-catchers, not troubling Mark in the least but frightening Sunshine and George Johnny even in

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their dreams. This was too big a trouble to bear by themselves. They asked Martha Mary all about it and she told them; offering no solution and proffering no hope.

Sunshine and George Johnny did their best. If your dog has not the brazen protection of a tag you must keep him where no one will find it out. But Mark had developed more alertness than prudence. In spite of their vigilance he would escape them, and in the interval before his return, always very dirty and affectionate, they passed through tortures of apprehension. Besides, when he was home, he seemed to think forever of eating. There was something lacking in Mark that he could not subsist upon affection.

In the meantime, some of the other dogs of Mark's acquaintance went riding away in a slatted wagon, and that was the last of them. A few of the animals were even delivered by their owners, who received in return a quarter of a dollar. Sunshine and George Johnny had not learned of this sort of business transaction, but Martha Mary

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had; and late one hot afternoon when she espied the slatted wagon in a neighboring street, she made haste to send the children on an errand to the grocery. Mark, this time, did not go with them.

As soon as the others were safely out of sight, Martha Mary took the dog up in her arms and looked forlornly toward the slatted wagon, then quickly set him down again. It would be all right, she was thinking, if for this once she were to give him a little milk. But when he had voraciously swallowed his ration, and was licking his lips, she again took him up and started away with him. Better he should go like this than meet the torture of the dog-catchers. He might be captured within sight of the children and that thought was too much for Martha Mary.

Mark cuddled down confidently against her shoulder, wagged his thick, white thumb of a tail, and with his soft, pink tongue gently lapped one of the girl's rough little hands.

“Quit!” she said, but for all that she

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walked steadily on, walked very fast at first; then went slower and slower; then stopped. Suddenly her arms fell, the dog leaped down and she turned abruptly, starting hastily toward the house.

CHAPTER VIII

DECORATED

UPON being released Mark gave chase to some sparrows, gaily and foolishly barking at them as they flirted up out of his reach, clumsily falling down when he tried to stop short, and looking after them in perplexity, with his pink tongue quivering out of the side of his mouth. But Martha Mary gave no heed to him. She hastened quietly into the house, and when the children returned they found her with arms folded upon the table, and her forehead pillow'd upon them. Yet as soon as Sunshine and George Johnny had come in, she was on her feet again, and quite in the usual way began the brief task of getting supper ready.

Meanwhile the children had sat down on the box under the window, with Mark be-

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tween them, and by and by George Johnny was asking:

“ Why doeth dogth gotta have collarth and brath tagth for? ”

An old question, this, which the elder sister had long ago wearied of answering.

“ Well, then,” the boy persisted, “ why don’t uth have no collar and tag for Mark? ”

“ Dog tax costs fi’ dollars, an’ us ain’t got no fi’ dollars, has us, Martha Mary? ” reasoned Sunshine, with her arm going tight about Mark’s neck. The child’s voice was wistful in its appeal, but not more wistful than was the elder sister’s as she asked:

“ Don’t you kids think you could git along without him? Sometimes dogs goes mad; that’s why they ketches ‘em. What if Mark’d go mad now, an’ tear ‘round bitin’ folks? ”

“ Mark don’t never git mad at *me*, ” George Johnny protested, and to prove the point he added exultingly: “ Thee, I can pinch his tail, an’ thick a pin in him, an’ thit on him, an’— an’— ”

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“ Shut up,” said Martha Mary.

What with her affection for the dog and her dread of having him dragged away before the children’s very eyes, the situation was becoming altogether unbearable. She and Jacob Christopher held a secret conference, according to which, on the following day, he put in a prompt appearance at home and showed himself uncommonly entertaining. With the baby in his arms, he lured Sunshine and George Johnny around to the shady side of the building and engaged them in the absorbing occupation of excavating dirt houses.

Meanwhile, Martha Mary, within, was giving Mark a meal of scraps which threw him into transports by its quantity and quality. The moment he had gobbled it, she lifted him into Happy’s perambulator, Mark’s one accomplishment being the art of lolling gracefully in that vehicle while he was pushed about. And since he could be depended upon neither to lead nor to follow, this trick now stood Martha Mary in good stead.

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Resolutely she grasped the perambulator's handle and started away, but on the instant, like a demure but uneasy spirit, trudged into view, George Johnny.

"Where you doin' ? Wait for me!" was his immediate and imperative hail.

"Can't wait," declared Martha Mary, attempting to carry the matter off with a rush. "I'm playin' dog ketcher. You can clod me if you want to. You can clod me good." By this ruse she hoped to make her escape, but it was a failure.

"Don't 'ant to clod you dood!" George Johnny exclaimed, and there began to steal over his face the shadow of coming storm. It was seldom, indeed, that he created a disturbance, but when he did feel it necessary to file a protest the result was remarkable, both for volume and duration.

Well did Martha Mary know that here was an element which demanded taking into account. Once let Sunshine appear on the scene and the plan must, for the time, be abandoned.

"Come along, then," she compromised.

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“ Only hush up, right this minute. Here, you wheel him; quick, before he jumps out.” By this diversion she gained a moment to run back and surreptitiously enlighten Jakey; then she and George Johnny proceeded on their way. Only now they constituted a circus parade, with George Johnny helping to propel the lion’s cage, in which Mark was supposed to be enacting the part of a fierce beast from the jungle.

After this fashion, the two children and their dog finally reached the police station, where Mark followed with docility into a room smelling strongly of tobacco smoke. But both Martha Mary and George Johnny held fast to the frayed end of the rope about his neck, and both looked scaredly up at Sergeant Whelan, who was peering out and down at them through his official window. He was a fat sergeant and when he leaned forward on his elbow, with the edge of the wide desk pressing against his stomach, it made him very red in the face.

“ Mebbe you ’re the p’liceman what kills the dogs. Are you? ” the girl questioned,

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with a lonesome shake in her voice. Both she and George Johnny held a little tighter to the rope, as if for protection.

“An’ ‘f I am, then what?” There was a note of curiosity in the sergeant’s tone and in the lifting of his black, bushy eyebrows. Nor was he the only one to show a degree of interest. The brass-buttoned row of policemen, lounging on a wooden bench and on chairs about the wall, smoked, and spat, and watched idly.

Martha Mary, in response to the sergeant’s question, offered him the end of the frayed rope.

“Here he is,” she said. “We brung him ourselves. We wanna get him killed, don’t we, George Johnny?”

Little brother did not reply; little brother had his hands to his eyes, and the black dimples of his wee, soft fists were getting wet.

“What for do you want him killed?” the sergeant inquired.

“We ain’t got no tag for him,” Martha Mary bravely but snuffily replied.

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"All right. We'll take care of him for you." Sergeant Whelan was very business-like, but such prompt acquiescence was not quite what Martha Mary had expected. Could n't the red-faced man see that Mark was no common dog? Her campaign had been planned, and she was forced to a new expedient.

"We thought mebbe somebody might want to buy him," she suggested, courageously, and then added with a burst of belated enthusiasm: "He's such a dandy dog!"

Tom Moriarty, the biggest of the policemen, chuckled expansively, and Mark, being conscious of an amiable atmosphere, delightedly wagged himself. His short tail had once been a disadvantage, but since he had grown thin, he wagged easily, clear to the shoulders. Martha Mary, however, did not so readily mistake the meaning of the chuckle, and as for George Johnny, the blackness was still melting out of the dimples of his fists.

"Well, I s'pose everybody *has* got plenty

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of dogs," the little girl conceded; then, after an interval of reflection, she said: "We jest can't let the dog ketchers git him. They use wires, you know, to do their ketchin' with, an' wires hurts awful. So we was thinkin' that mebbe, if you did n't want to kill him — he's such a dandy dog — we was thinkin' that mebbe you could keep him,— keep him for your own se'f."

"We keep 'em in the pound five days," said the sergeant. "Then they have to be put out of the way."

"An' you could n't keep him?"

"Keep him? W'y 'f we kep' all of 'em, we'd have a reg'lar dogs' boardin' school!"

Very clumsy humor, this may have been, and yet the sergeant was not unkind; only how was Martha Mary to know that? She looked straight at him, but there did not seem to be anything more for her to say, and as for George Johnny, he was steadily patting the dog, while Mark wagged and grinned complacently and scratched himself.

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At last the little girl again held up the rope-end.

"I guess you 'll have to take him." She choked, but for the benefit of little brother, whose hand she now squeezed solidly in hers, she bravely added: "They 'd ketch him anyhow, an' we could n't stand it to see 'em ketch him." Then she remembered about the quarter and she looked at Sergeant Whelan expectantly, but since nothing of the kind seemed to occur to him, she turned away as she said, "Come on, George Johnny."

It was now that Tom Moriarty created a disturbance. His solid feet came solidly down from the top of the reading table; they struck the floor with a jar that made the windows rattle, and he mentioned something as impolite as it was emphatic. At the same time, he took off his helmet, which must have been a relief to the other men in the room, if one might judge by the way silver coins went clinking into it. A strange thing about it, so Martha Mary afterward reflected, was that there should

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have been such a substantial ring of money when the helmet finally reached Sergeant Whelan.

The meaning of it all was not the least bit clear to the children, and yet it was a triumphal march, a very triumphal march when their circus parade took its course back toward the drainage ditch. This time, with great importance, George Johnny led the procession. He had pulled up, from somewhere along the way, a sun-weed stalk, and the round, yellow-faced flowers at the top went jerking in time to his strutting, jerky steps. But the blossoms were not so bright as the decoration worn by a certain lionized dog.

For all that, there was no place for him in his lion cage. It was laden with humpy bags and neat parcels, one of which exhaled an appetizing odor of ground coffee. A cook wagon, Martha Mary called it, and she proudly pushed it along, while the summer wind flapped her faded apron about the bend of her knees.

“Thunthine! Thee!” called out George

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Johnny. He had spied a waiting group near the little house: Jakey with Sunshine and the baby, interestedly watched their approach.

Wildly George Johnny was flourishing his sun-weed stalk as the procession advanced enveloped by a golden dust. The setting sun had at last burned bravely through the pall of packing house smoke, and in the reddening glow, the brass tag upon the dog's breast was all a-sparkle, transmuted into precious metal. Mark had been decorated.

CHAPTER IX

THE WEDDING TRIP

FOR an entire week Mark's rugged health was imperiled. Through over-feeding he came near to losing his perfect digestion and his active habits. Then the contents of the cook wagon gave out and Mark, as well as the rest of the family, went back to their former sparing and exceedingly uncertain fare.

Once more Martha Mary began to talk about the wedding trip, and though Jakey, having tasted real diversion, at the Orpheum, could no longer be cheered by fantastic imaginings, the two younger children were readily beguiled by whatever rainbow-hued bauble of fancy their sister dangled before them.

Yet to little Happy a wedding trip could bring no solace. He wailed ceaselessly, but the cry was growing less troublesome

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because less loud. It was this hoarse and feeble wailing which helped to guide a graceful woman in a gray gown who came stepping around the puddles one day over the muddy flat.

She paused at the Blatzenfelds' door.

Martha Mary did not see the visitor at first. She was very busy sousing Sunshine's apron and George Johnny's trousers in a rusty pan outside the door, while the two were in forced confinement within, noisily trying to divert Happy, one of whose changes was already dripping on the line, with its red-lettered legend of felicity grown sadly dim.

"Are n't you getting your washing out early?" came a voice of a quality not usual in this neighborhood.

The small figure straightened up to meet the regard of the superintendent of the Detention Home, known among recalcitrant juveniles as the "Kids' Lady," but those imposing facts were unrevealed and unimportant to Martha Mary. She was looking at a gently smiling woman, the lines about

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whose soft brown eyes were only lines of loving.

“Oh, yes ‘m,” the child answered, flashing back the friendly smile. “I gotta get the kids cleaned up ‘fore me an’ Jakey takes ‘em on our weddin’ trip. Sunshine an’ George Johnny, you go back there!” as two small nudes appeared in the doorway. “Jakey, he ain’t here just now. He’s the father of us, and I’m the mother. We gotta baby.” She dived through the doorway, leaving even the experienced Miss Maynard slightly bewildered, to reappear snuggling Happy’s little head in her neck, and sat down in such a way as to bar the door against the egress of the two other children, who hovered in the background, pink and unashamed.

The story poured itself out easily in response to the visitor’s practised questions: a cheerful commingling of fancy, fact and ignorance. That they had anything to complain of never occurred to Martha Mary. Only once her tone grew anxious as she jounced the fretting Happy on her knee,

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his little head bobbing weakly back and forth.

"I don't think he looks real well, do you? Even for a baby?" She leaned over and peered around into the tiny face, withered and brown, like an old man's, and twisting into a scowl. "Mebbe I ain't fed 'im just right. He's always the *best* baby!" She hugged him close while he feebly protested. "I 'spect the weddin' trip will do 'im good, don't you? If he should git sick," her face took on the drawn solicitude of maternity, "I guess I could n't *ever* stand it."

The lines of loving had deepened about the eyes of Miss Maynard.

"How would you like," she asked, "to let me go with you on your wedding trip? How would you like, all of you, to take a trip to a beautiful house I know, where there are other children and where you can have everything you need? We could go on the car this afternoon."

"Aw, now!" said the girl incredulously, and her loyal gray eyes reproached this woman who could have the heart to tantalize

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her with a fairy tale — a dream so much beyond any she had ever been able to invent that it could not possibly come true.

Then the warning of Mrs. Kelly echoed in the back of Martha Mary's brain. What was it that friendly adviser had cautioned against? She could recall but one word, and since this lady looked so nice and seemed so gentle and considerate, she tried to state the objection politely:

“Are you — is it — ?” she stammered.
“Is that house you mean, a charities?”

“I do not call it so,” was the guarded reply of the Kids' Lady. “It answers a good many different purposes. Sometimes,” she continued with a smile, “I have known it to be the Half-Way House to Happiness.”

Martha Mary was mystified but not convinced, and Miss Maynard, seeing the doubt in the small face, at once so childish and so mature, used the one argument that she knew would prevail.

“I will tell you the truth, little girl. I think this is a very sick baby. I am afraid

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if you stay here with him he will never get well."

Terror sprang into the child's eyes, but her self-reliance came quickly back.

"No, he ain't so very sick," she stoutly declared. "He don't get no worse. He ain't used to being fat."

"Well, he would get used to it, if you would come with me. Out at that big house there is a sunny nursery and a lady who knows just how to make sick babies well. You could help to take care of him, and in a month he would be so fat and rosy you would n't know him. Don't you think you 'd better come?"

"Would all of us go?"

"Of course you would."

"An' would we ride on the street cars; on the open-work cars?"

"Yes, indeed, dear," said Miss Maynard. "If you will go, I will come back for you this afternoon at five o'clock."

For a moment Martha Mary regarded thoughtfully the infant in her arms. Then she said decisively, "Yes, sir, we will!"

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As she laid the baby on the doorstep and made for the rusty tin pan, she concluded, "I got to get these kids' things dry."

Their preparations for departure were necessarily simple, one problem alone presenting itself: the disposal of Mark. This obstacle loomed so large for a time that Martha Mary began to wish no wedding trip had been arranged, but Jakey solved that question upon his arrival, in a manner which was for him quite brilliant. He proposed that they give Mark to the butcher's boy, with the proviso that when they were back again in their wonted neighborhood they should once more have their property. Jakey scurried away in haste to look up Mark's future master and arrange his project. He came back triumphant. The butcher's boy was delighted, Sunshine and George Johnny were not; but by making a great bustle of getting off, Martha Mary averted any outburst of grief.

On the car the children were very quiet, only Martha Mary kept gazing down into Happy's weazened little face and then look-

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ing up at her friend to ask: "I think it's doin' 'im good a'ready, don't you? I do b'lieve he's beginnin' to look a little better."

She had no doubt of her baby's sure recovery when she saw the place that was to take them in—a generous building set back in the sweep of a shaded lawn—and as they went up the walk the Kids' Lady, mother-eyed and smiling, took Martha Mary's limp little hand in the clasp of her warm, soft fingers. They followed her into a cool-hued library, and Happy lay on her lap while she asked a few questions and wrote in her big superintendent's book.

"What was your father—his occupation?" asked Miss Maynard.

Martha Mary had no slightest notion what that meant and she puzzled for an instant, trying to think of any useful thing that her father had been, but could not recall one. So she answered cheerily, "Yes 'm, I believe he was."

It was difficult for the elder sister to

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keep her mind on the answers, for the whole place, even to the library, was filled with the smell of new baked bread. They had it for supper, great sweet flapping slices, with fragrant apple sauce, and all the milk they could drink. Sunshine and George Johnny could hardly stay awake to eat. Happy was already in a white crib upstairs, bathed and fed and fast asleep. Martha Mary had seen him.

Now, as they trooped with the others from the children's dining-room, she went up to Miss Maynard.

"Dast me an' Jakey go outdoors?" she questioned.

"Yes," granted the superintendent, at the same time reaching out for Sunshine, who, tired and replete, was exhibiting the first symptoms of a "tankrum." Having seen that small thunderstorm safely in the care of a bed-time attendant, Miss Maynard stepped back into the empty dining-room and looked out between the curtains at the two older children. Slowly they circled the front of the house and stopped

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under a broad tree, not far from the open window. The girl's voice came in with the damp coolness of the evening.

"Jus' smell it, Jakey!" Martha Mary's sharp little nose sniffed audibly the unpolluted breeze. "Ain't it somep'n gran'? I did n't never b'lieve *reely* that we'd have no weddin' trip. An' to have it end up like this!"

She stopped, looking at her brother, who had flopped upon the grass, squirming on his back like a little animal and wriggling his newly washed toes into the cool, green turf. His sister sat down slowly, leaning her back against the trunk of the tree.

"Jakey," she said, after a moment, but the lure of companionship had beckoned Jacob Christopher. With his hands in his pockets and an air of fine indifference, he was sauntering toward a group of boys at the further end of the grounds. Martha Mary looked in his direction rather wistfully, then she rested her head against the tree's rough bark.

A half hour later, when Miss Maynard

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came to take her in, the girl did not waken. Sleep and the twilight had brought a look almost babyish into her small face. The Kids' Lady stooped to touch the sharp little shoulder, and as Martha Mary's cheek dropped against the protecting hand, she remarked with the uncertain accents of sleep, but in the crisp tone of authority:

“Hush now — hush up! — you ain’t neither hungry.”

CHAPTER X

LAND OF THE BLESSED SLEEP

SLOWLY Martha Mary and the Kids' Lady moved along over the grass together, hearing the shouts of the boys, who were running and scrambling about among the apple trees, in a thoroughly boyish and unorganized fashion. There came, also, the shriller screams and giggles of a group of girls who were playing drop-the-handkerchief, on a level green at the side of the grounds. Miss Maynard's arm was around Martha Mary's shoulders, and it pressed the little girl's head gently against the smooth, cool folds of a blue linen skirt.

All this was very strange and at the same time very delightful to Martha Mary. Though well-accustomed to the vicissitudes of a haphazard existence, this day had been really the most surprising and

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tiring of her experience. Her eyes were wide open, but she felt numbly yet tinglingly asleep to the ends of her thin legs and arms.

How good it would seem to be taken upstairs where she could crawl under the covers of one of those small white beds she had glimpsed through an open doorway! In a half dream she dragged her feet over the clipped softness of the grass, and she was dreadfully sorry when Miss Maynard stopped and took away the embracing arm to shake hands with a big man.

The man had appeared, followed by several of the smaller boys, from around the front corner of the house, and it took Martha Mary's weary eyes a considerable interval to travel to the top of him. He was, as she would have expressed it, both high-up and wide-out; besides, his face, when you did get to it, was undeniably ugly. And yet Martha Mary was not surprised that the Kids' Lady greeted the man in a voice of most friendly welcome. He certainly did

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seem like the kind of person you would be glad to see. Three of the little boys were acting as an immediate bodyguard, two youths of a more self-conscious age shambled in the rear, and the man's hand was wooling the inky kinks upon the head of "African Mick," properly McKinley Jones.

"Here is one of our latest arrivals," Miss Maynard was saying. "This is Martha Mary, Judge Sunderland. And now, if you will excuse me a moment, I will see that this new daughter is properly taken care of for the night."

Once upstairs, Martha Mary was turned over to a *young*, young lady, a pretty young lady, too, with nice ways and the name of Miss Clara. Yet she did not seem to understand in the least that all Martha Mary wanted was to crawl between the covers of a white bed. No, indeed; the young lady had other plans which she carried out with promptness and energy. Martha Mary was given such a bathing and scrubbing and combing as she had never dreamed of,

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and of which she did not particularly approve. But she submitted with sleepy and silent docility, until Miss Clara remarked:

“Good thing your hair is n’t curly.”

Then Martha Mary’s mind wandered around to the rest of the family. “Did Sunshine git hers combed?” she questioned drowsily.

“Sunshine’s had to be cut off,” replied Miss Clara. “Do you want to see her?”

Martha Mary was now in a clean nightie. It was much too long; she had to hold it up with both hands, above her feet that were brightly pink from soap and hot water, while she followed Miss Clara into the dormitory.

It was not yet the hour for regular bed-time and the narrow iron cots were still smoothly spread; but at one side, near an open door, a dark head rested on a pillow. Sunshine was fast asleep, her hair, what was left of it, sticking out in stiff, ragged wisps. The shears had certainly been wielded by a determined, if not altogether skilful hand. But the cheeks of Sun-

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shine, where the long, black lashes rested, were an olive-rose from recent and thorough washing, and her small hands, snuggled beside her face on the pillow, were cleaner than they had probably ever been before. Sunshine was still very pretty. The elder sister looked up at Miss Clara.

“I bet she kicked awful,” was her experienced comment.

“She certainly did,” Miss Clara agreed.

Martha Mary said nothing more until she was at last really laying her head upon a pillow of her own; then she reflected, in a tone of regret:

“Sunshine had awful nice curls.”

“Yes, she had, dear,” Miss Clara’s voice was sympathetic, “but they will soon grow again, and when they are brushed regularly they will be prettier than ever.” Even as she spoke she was moving down the room, and before she was out of the door Martha Mary was gone, too, far into that blessed country of sleep, whose gates open so easily and so wide for little children.

CHAPTER XI

THE KIDS' LADY

MEANWHILE the Blatzenfeld history was being outlined for Judge Sunderland, as he sat on the front veranda in the cooling twilight, with the Kids' Lady in a wide-armed chair not far away.

Parts of the recital were necessarily given in a fragmentary undertone. In fact, anything that Miss Maynard had to say at this hour would be riddled by interruptions. For, notwithstanding the two teachers who were on the lawn with the children, some ubiquitous juvenile was always in need of affection or correction from the main source.

Judge Sunderland leaned back, watching them, and the aspect of it all struck him quite freshly, as well-accustomed things will suddenly, to our surprise, meet us with new faces, as if for the first time. Scarce a

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child in the motley group who had ever thought of physical discomfort and deprivation as anything but a necessary accompaniment of life. Some of them were mentally askew, many had been ungovernable and vicious. Yet here they were, their hearts as well as their bodies fed, surrounded by an atmosphere of sensible lenience, and the whole collection, apparently, about as dangerous as a basket of puppies.

When the last of the line had disappeared up the stairs the Judge turned again to the Kids' Lady and noted that she seemed all at once to have grown younger. A look of tension, which he realized more keenly by its absence, had left her face. He leaned forward, regarding her thoughtfully; then he said, with his accustomed directness:

“ You’re tired. What *have* you been doing to-day? ”

“ Well, for one thing, I had to go down on the river flats, and that, you know, is how I happened to pick up these little Blatzfelds.”

“ But why,” the Judge asked, with ju-

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dicial severity, " why do you persist in trying to do the work of more than three people? The visiting is all arranged for; you should not take so much upon yourself."

" But sometimes I must see for myself, you know. And I did not go looking for trouble. I merely happened upon it. Those absurd little chicks had to be brought here."

" Yes, oh, yes," sighed the Judge. " You women always have the best of reasons for anything you have a mind to do. Now about these Blatzenheimer youngsters, or whatever their name is— any relatives likely to show up? "

" From what they tell me, I imagine not. I telephoned a probation officer. He may be able to locate one of the parents before you hold court again. But in all probability we have simply to find homes for them. I wish that really were so simple. No difficulty about the baby, but as for the others, they don't all fill the requirements."

" Requirements? "

" Oh, yes, indeed! People have very def-

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inite requirements. And they are so sure of the unselfishness of their charitable intentions! They tell you so seriously that they would like the baby to have blue eyes, yellow curls, and a good disposition. Above everything, it must be well born!"

The Judge threw back his head and laughed:

"Bad as that?"

Smiling at her own caricature of facts, Miss Maynard added:

"Well, but isn't it a bit vexing? Only think of the good chances that will come in the way of the little Blatzenfelds who happen to be pretty, instead of to plain Martha Mary, who has been such a little brick!"

"Yes, yes, that's true, to be sure; that's always the way; but, after all, it averages up, it averages up."

The Judge's voice had the same rich hopefulness, that emanation of good health, good will and good work, which shone through the massive blocking out of his face. It was a face which seemed to have been hewn, not molded; and the spirit

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within lighted, instead of shaping it. "Is n't the Judge the ugliest man you ever saw?" a lady visitor at juvenile court had once whispered to Miss Maynard, at the same time poking her pretty head forward, the better to scrutinize His Honor.

On that occasion, weeks ago, Judge Sunderland had been utterly unconscious of observation. Five very little boys were crowding close about him, each trying to get nearer than the other; one, indeed, sitting on the edge of the rostrum, right by the Judge's chair, his curly black head sticking up in the curve of the Judge's arm, whose hand was put out to rest upon another boy's shoulder. The whole quintette were grave malefactors. They had broken into a freight car and were then realizing the enormity of their crime; yet, at the same time, they were relating every detail of the affair to their judge, in the firm assurance that he would give them a square deal.

Just as the visiting lady made her remark, the youngster of the black curls had his great dark eyes upturned to the Judge's

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face, while the round and shining tears of childhood rolled after each other down the boy's cheeks.

“Ugly?” Miss Maynard had asked herself, and had gone on with the thought: “Yes, he is — the most beautiful ugly man who ever looked at life through the medium of kindness.”

CHAPTER XII

GOING TO LAW

WHIZZING along in an open car, with Miss Maynard and Sunshine back of her, George Johnny beside her, and Jakey with a dozen other juveniles occupying seats in front and across the aisle, Martha Mary's heart was light. The last few days had put quite out of her mind such an empty fantasy as a wedding trip. The present being fully satisfying, what need was there to draw upon the future?

From the night of his arrival at the Home, little Happy had stopped crying. He slept almost constantly, and in spite of the nurse's assurance that rest was just what he needed, and that before long he would be fat and dimpled, Martha Mary longed to waken him, and make him laugh, that she might see whether the dimples had begun to come yet. But her faith in the nurse was

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only second to her faith in the Kids' Lady. Whatever the big home was, and Martha Mary found it quite pleasant enough to accept without question, she felt sure it was not one of those places against which Mrs. Kelly had warned her. In the sudden relief from responsibility, her very soul danced. She entered into the games with the other children as though she could never play enough, and she laughed with an up-spring of childish gaiety to which Miss Maynard stopped to listen with a smile.

Martha Mary turned about, now, in her seat, to refresh, by actual sight, her sense of the gracious presence back of her. Sunshine had slipped a hand on Miss Maynard's lap, and the stubby brown fingers were clasped in the slim white ones; upon the face of that ardent little rebel was a new look of softness.

The car came to a grinding pause at a street corner and George Johnny pulled his sister's sleeve. They had halted before a massive hospital building where, beside a pillared doorway, stood a carven figure of

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Saint Vincent with a child in his arms. The benignity of that sculptured form impressed even George Johnny.

“Is it God?” he whispered.

“Yes,” said Martha Mary. And then, for further elucidation, “He’s mindin’ the baby.”

But the elder sister did not so easily arrive at conclusions when they were all in the court room. Some of the cases were not difficult to understand. If a boy had made too dextrous use of a brick-bat upon the person of a small neighbor, or if he had failed to observe the rights of property, it was clearly his due to be reprimanded. But why did some of the children cry when their only offense appeared to be the lack of proper care? Why were many of the parents angry with the Judge, though he seemed never to be out of temper or even unkind? And what did it mean to go to Kearney?

Such a general atmosphere of trouble brooded over the place, that Martha Mary began to have suspicions whether she and

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her little flock might not, after all, have fallen into the abode of charities. Yet Miss Maynard had said — Martha Mary leaned forward to get a glimpse of the Kids' Lady sitting at one corner of the long table, next the Judge. That gentle face was still gravely sweet, and there was something in its look, Martha Mary could not have told what it was, but something which quieted her forebodings. She could not make out the meaning of it all, but since the Kids' Lady was here it somehow meant good; of that she felt assured.

So when a man with a loud voice ran his finger down the page of an enormous book and said something about the Blatzenfeld case, she was not at all uneasy. Miss Maynard motioned to them to come and sit in chairs beside her. Then, when Sunshine had climbed up, George Johnny had been lifted up, and Jakey and Martha Mary had sidled into their places, the Judge looked down the diminishing line with a smile, and brought his gaze back to the eldest girl.

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“So this is the mother of the family?” he observed.

“Yes, sir,” said the girl, promptly, unconscious that any one was amused. Indeed, it was not amusement which shone in the Judge’s deep-blue eyes. Martha Mary, looking into those eyes, made up her mind instantly that she liked the Judge.

Miss Maynard answered the Judge’s questions. They were few and simple; the Blatzenfeld case, so far, being chiefly distinguished by its lack of complications.

“Can you accommodate them for the present?” asked the Judge of Miss Maynard.

The Kids’ Lady replied that she could.

“Then that will be best until we can make further arrangements,” concluded the Judge. “You have been a good little mother.” He patted Martha Mary on the shoulder, as he had done on that evening when she first saw him. “A fine little mother, but I think it will be best for all of you to stay with Miss Maynard for awhile. One thing,

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it will be so much better for your baby out there. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, sir," breathed Martha Mary. It was like being sentenced to Heaven. The quartette slid out of their chairs to make way for others, Martha Mary smiling back happily at the Kids' Lady. They belonged now to the Kids' Lady. Only what was it the Judge meant about arrangements? Martha Mary did not know, even the word would not stay in her mind, but the feeling it gave her she could not forget.

CHAPTER XIII

HER " OWNEST OWN "

AT last was Happy Blatzenfeld living up to the name so casually bestowed by a facetious parent. Back of his father and mother were generations of a strong and simple people, and thereby Happy possessed what physicians exult over as a good constitution. When, in the Home's nursery, he was given fresh air, fresh milk and fresh water, intelligently administered, he responded like any other small animal. He gave up looking a thousand years old and tired of it. In an amazingly short time he returned to gurgling, dimpling babyhood. His gold-brown hair grew shiny in the light, and sat up, like little duck-tails, in incipient curls all over his head. There was an especially seductive ringlet around each crumply, pink ear, and his eyes were confidently blue.

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Standing in the sun-flooded nursery one morning, between the white iron cribs, Miss Maynard was looking down at him. He lay all smiles and coos, kicking up his round legs in a pair of much-washed and shrunken socks that were still far too big, and paddling the air with short arms that begged the "taking" for which there is small leisure at county institutions. It was high time, as the Kids' Lady well knew, that she should set in motion the machinery which would eventually secure for the little chap a suitable and permanent home. There would be no difficulty in "placing" this child; and, as speedily as possible, he ought to make room for others, perhaps less attractive than himself. Expenses must be kept down, since superintendents are accountable to boards, and boards, presumably, are accountable to tax-payers who do the voting.

Moreover, though Happy was thriving in the somewhat rigid lap of organized charity, he had a right to a flesh and blood father and mother; and Miss Maynard was hold-

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ing all this clearly in mind while she gave him a rolling snuggle, which set him off in chirps of glee. The chirps subsided, when he saw that she was turning away, but redoubled in joyfulness almost immediately as Martha Mary appeared in the open doorway.

Big sister, too, had taken a modicum of softness upon her angles, and as the Kids' Lady watched her seize the welcoming baby and sit down, hugging him all in a fat and tumbled bundle into her arms, she thought the love in the plain little face was as sweet a light as she had ever seen. But there was no denying that Martha Mary was not a pretty child, especially now that she was nearing the age when skirts seem always too short and elbows too aggressive. Even artfully fashioned attire often falls powerless, while of course, Martha Mary wore the left-overs which arrived at the institution in bundles generously huge, if not always suitable in contents. Her present frock, of red wool that had faded in washing, was remarkably like a length of stove-pipe with a deep frill at the bottom. It was

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a style known as the "Baby-Doll" dress, and since it was undeniably and hideously the mode, Martha Mary rejoiced in it, declaring it "swell!"

The little girl possessed a sort of snapping optimism which enabled her to view many seemingly adverse circumstances in a high light of very genuine, if sometimes amusing, satisfaction. But there could be no doubt about the rapturous attributes of the baby she was holding.

"Ain't he just the beautifulest!" she cried, trying to turn him around for Miss Maynard's better inspection, while he bounced and teetered upon legs which were completely untrustworthy. With a crow of victory, he clutched both hands into Martha Mary's smoothly brushed and braided hair.

"Now, now, baby must n't be naughty!" the girl crooned, and in her voice was a mother note, as she gently strove to detach the clawing pink fingers. "He always was good, even when he was sickest, but now he's just — just a *dumpling angel!* An' you know, Miss Maynard," Martha Mary

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looked up earnestly into the face above her, "I ain't hardly any homesick for Jakey; 'specially, since he 's in such a good place with that widow-lady, an' goin' on with his carryin' papers, an' everything. Sunshine an' George Johnny, they 're plum stuck on this kinter garden, an' Sunshine don't have a hollerin' spell half so often. Do you think she does?"

"No, indeed," Miss Maynard acquiesced. "She will learn in time to control her temper."

"Yes 'm, I guess so." Martha Mary's tone carried a shade of doubt. "Anyhow, she 's awful smart. But Happy, he 's my ownest-own baby, an' I love him most to pieces!" She kissed him ravenously, in the soft places of his neck, holding him so tight that he squealed in protest. The Kids' Lady, meanwhile, drew a long breath which was very like a sigh.

"I think," she said, "you 'd better come with me now."

Martha Mary got to her feet with as much promptness as the weight of the baby

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would permit, and lifted the disappointed Happy into the middle of his crib.

"Yes 'm," the little girl reminded herself, "I expect Miss Helen 's needin' me to peel on the potatoes." From the first she had evinced a willing, if sometimes almost too vigorous, zeal in the kitchen, a zeal which was extremely useful in a menage dependent, in a large measure, upon transient and often sulky helpers.

As they went to the stair-head together, the Kids' Lady reached out an encircling arm and led the child into her own room, then closed the door. She had an impulse to take the little girl into her lap, but felt, all at once, that Martha Mary was not used to that, and so sat down and drew the little figure close to her.

"I want to talk to you, dear," she said.

At once Martha Mary looked frightened.

"Now, don't worry. You are a good girl and you have pleased me always, pleased me so much that I should like to keep you, and George Johnny, and Sunshine, and

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the baby, keep all of you right here. But you see that is not possible. We must find good homes for you all, such as Jakey already has. We have to make room, you understand, for other children who need to come here. Now Georgie or Sunshine may go first, but the baby is so sweet! and there are many women who would like such a baby. You are a very helpful, active little girl; there will be (not quite so soon, perhaps) a place for you, too. You would be willing, would n't you? You would see that this is best; that it may be the only plan?"

The child had drawn away from her and now stood at a little distance, big-eyed, with an expression of weird maturity in her small face.

"Do you mean?—let somebody have Happy for *their* baby? And me go live with other folks?"

Miss Maynard sought safety in delay. "Perhaps not, dear. We will try very hard to arrange it so that you and the baby may be together. But if it should happen other-

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wise, if it should be best for *him*, then you would be willing, would n't you?"

Martha Mary clutched her hands at her sides, and the gray eyes blazed. "No," she cried, "I would n't, and I *won't!*"

It was well that the wisdom of the woman understood, how this rebellion was not in the least against her authority. But before she could speak, Martha Mary's head came burrowing into her lap, and the little girl was choking out, in the midst of childhood's despairing tears, that Happy was her "ownest-own baby" and nobody else should ever have him to keep, not "ever nor ever!"

She grew comforted when Miss Maynard took her into her arms, and by and by she raised her eyes, much swollen but already lighted with their natural shrewd philosophy:

"Course, I could n't never stand to have him git so sick again, but any lady would n't want to tend him all the time; now, would she? And he likes me awful well. I guess the lady would let me go, too, to take care of

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him.” She looked up into Miss Maynard’s face with something like a smile. “She would, would n’t she?”

“Yes, I do think she would,” the Kids’ Lady answered, “and we will see about it right away.”

CHAPTER XIV

FORCED SURRENDER

THE facts needed no adorning to make what a young newspaper reporter voted "good stuff." The staff photographer came out to the Home to take a picture of the children together, and the reporter wrote a "story" that undoubtedly had "heart interest." But the paper was crowded for space that day; so the city editor drew a blue pencil through all but the first two paragraphs of the little tale. The most the public got was an enticing likeness of Happy, who came out well, a blur of a plain little girl, and the information that the two needed a home and would like to be together.

When Miss Maynard, glancing from the window the next day as visitors were announced, saw at the curb a shining, long-bodied car, with a waiting chauffeur, she

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surmised at once that she had been correct about the drawing power of little Happy's pictured face.

She liked the big business man who stepped aside to allow the pale, pretty woman to enter before him. The woman said, quite without preface:

“Is he here yet? the lovely baby? that was in the paper?”

The assurance that he was brought a look of relief.

“I was afraid he might be gone before we could come,” sighed the visitor. (The name on her card was Mrs. Addison.) “May we see him now, please?” Her manner held the graciousness that assumes acquiescence.

To fetch the baby Miss Maynard went herself, ascertaining at the same time that Martha Mary was in the kitchen. A fresh white slip, a few touches to the enterprising gold duck-tails, and Happy made his appearance in the library, radiating amiability.

The woman approached a trifle timidly, while her husband stepped back; but finding

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that the child had no fear of strangers, Mrs. Addison surrounded him with eager arms.

“ You rosebud thing! And to think *you* should need a home! a home! ”

She carried the baby over to her husband, and leaning close against him, half put the boy into his arms. Mr. Addison dintered the child’s cheek with a tentative finger, and Happy returned the courtesy by an ineffectual grab for the gold-rimmed eyeglasses above him.

“ Is n’t he just what we have been wishing for, dear? Let us take him now. I simply cannot go away without him.” The wife looked up at her husband with an expression not used to being denied, but Miss Maynard suggested:

“ There are several other babies here you might like to see. And, you know, this little fellow has a sister, some years older. We had hoped to place the two together. There are other children in the family, but the little girl is especially fond of this baby. She has had much of the care of him.”

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Mrs. Addison was listening sympathetically.

"We gleaned something of that from the paper," she said. "But I—but, you see—" She looked up at her husband. "Robert, I believe I could tell Miss Maynard better, just by ourselves."

"Surely, surely," he responded, and when the superintendent had ushered him into an adjoining room she returned to find his wife established in a rocker, the baby in her lap, her story already written in her face.

"You see, it is n't that we could n't take two children, Miss Maynard, but we have so wanted a baby of our own. And when we knew we must give that up . . ." She paused a moment, her lips trembling. then went on again, "It seemed to me I had to find one somewhere to fill the place. It is n't so easy. There are so many you *could n't* take, but when I saw this darling's picture . . ." She looked down at the little fellow with a face of rapture, and he smiled back while he tried to get the frilly

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end of her long veil into his mouth, but tickled his nose instead and made himself sneeze.

Mrs. Addison laughed like a girl, with the sudden reaction, and held the baby closer, at the same time looking with bright confidence at Miss Maynard.

“ You doubtless know of Mr. Addison?—Addison and Blake? We can give every reference and assurance that could possibly be desired. And could n’t the baby go with us now? You know, we had concluded that if we found the right child we did n’t want to know about his parentage. Very impractical, I suppose, but if we had that always in our minds it might make him seem less our own. Could n’t he possibly go with us now? and the stupid business arrangements be made later? ”

It took a moment’s thought before Miss Maynard said :

“ Only the court, of course, has authority to give him to you. I might let him go for a visit, which could, without a doubt, be indefinitely prolonged.” She smiled, then

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grew serious again. "But I must tell you, Mrs. Addison, that I feel his sister has a right to be asked."

The visitor's delicate forehead creased in disappointment.

"But what if she objects? Oh, she must n't do that. She would n't surely, would she? At least, not if she understood how much we could do for the baby. Of course she loves him, but even a little girl will understand — could n't you ask her right away? I think I would rather not see her. If we never saw her it would be so much easier not to remember, don't you know, about the baby."

"Yes, I think I get your meaning." Miss Maynard appeared to hesitate a moment, then she opened the door to admit Mr. Addison, and at the same time left the room.

She found Martha Mary still in the kitchen, her thin arms resting upon the edge of a huge pan of muddy water and potato parings, just removing the brown coat from the "last of the littlest ones." Fortunately

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she was alone for the moment and Miss Maynard gratefully seized the opportunity to have the matter appear casual.

“A lady and gentleman are here, Martha Mary, to see Happy. They are so pleased with him that they want to take him home with them for a little visit. I told them I would ask you. I was sure you would be willing.”

Miss Maynard was conscious that she had made a poor success of her effort to speak lightly. Without lifting the potato pan Martha Mary appeared to slide out from under it, leaving it to occupy the chair.

“Shall I go get my things now?” she asked.

“That was not what I meant, dear,” corrected her friend. “I meant would you be willing to have the baby go? It is only the baby they want, at present — for a visit, you know.”

Martha Mary had sidled away and now stood with her back to the door. Miss Maynard could see that she was pale, even

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under the freckles. In spite of herself the Kids' Lady felt impelled to a futile attempt at explanation.

"It is only for a visit, now," she repeated lamely. "Mrs. Addison seems a very sweet woman. You think it is best, don't you, to let the baby have this good chance? They will take excellent care of him."

"Did she say she would n't want somebody to *help* take care of him?"

"She did n't say she would n't," Miss Maynard felt herself floundering before that direct gaze. "But this is not a permanent arrangement, you know. I felt that we ought not to interpose any obstacles—" She stopped, not wishing to designate Martha Mary as an obstacle, but her caution was wasted. All the possibilities were darkly shadowed in the depths of Martha Mary's eyes. The child seemed to flatten out against the door, her lips quivered as if with speech, but enunciated never a syllable. Finally she grew crimson, from the ends of the small hands pressed against the wood-work, clear to the margin of her hair.

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And then she burst out, almost in one word, which ended in a sobbing scream:

“She can have him! she can have him! she can *have* him! I don’t *care*!” And flinging her slim body around the edge of the door, she banged it behind her, and was gone.

Miss Maynard stood a moment looking after her, but not in vexation nor even in astonishment at this sudden outburst,—she knew Martha Mary. She sighed, at last, and, turning slowly, went back to the front of the house.

The Addisons glanced up at her when she entered the office, with just the air of expectant confidence which she had anticipated! they were so used to getting whatever they wanted. Miss Maynard’s briefly worded consent to their taking the baby home with them they received with gracious courtesy. About the sister they asked no questions.

When Happy was at last swished away in the shining car amid dust and honkings, the Kids’ Lady felt relieved. There had

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been moments when she had feared she was going to lose sight of her duty. Now she could go to Martha Mary.

She was sure where the child could be found and there she was, a sodden heap in the middle of her small white bed. Miss Maynard bent over and smoothed the damp hair back from the little hot forehead, but Martha Mary only hid her face the tighter and her whole body shook. She could not see how pitying was the face of the Kids' Lady as she sat down on the side of the bed and waited. Finally came a voice from above :

“ They are not taking him to keep — not yet, Martha Mary.”

The child turned her face up quickly: “ Don’t they want him? ” she asked, with mingled incredulity and resentment.

“ They want him greatly,” assured the Kids’ Lady, and then she added, afraid of promising too much, “ It may be differently arranged.”

Martha Mary made no sign except once more to turn away her head.

CHAPTER XV

STAMPEDED

MARTHA MARY no longer needed to ask, Martha Mary knew that this place to which they had come was some sort of a charities. When the lady of the watch had offered a home to Jakey, because she was lonely and wanted a boy about the house, it had seemed a lucky chance. She was not a rich lady at all; she said she would have liked to take all the little family, had it been possible. Jakey was still to sell papers and Miss Maynard pronounced that just as well, because it would "develop his character." About this phase of the affair Martha Mary had not much of an opinion, but since Jakey liked the arrangement well enough to vote it "a snap" the elder sister was satisfied.

Now if somebody should want Sunshine and George Johnny, if somebody very nice

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should come, who looked able to manage Sunshine, Martha Mary felt that she could, perhaps, bear to see them go, because she was beginning to understand how it was best.

But not the baby! oh, no, not her baby!
Never the baby!

She no longer believed that any one would take Happy and her together. She did not even believe that the baby would come back from his visiting. In fact, there was not much left of Martha Mary's beliefs, once so upspringing. The gay little spirit which had brought her through so many adversities, and kept her full of vim and laughter, was fast losing its power of reaction. Almost, Martha Mary did not believe in the Kids' Lady. She still loved her; oh, yes, she loved her! yet that in itself was somehow a pain. She could not confide in her any more, and she asked no further questions. She said little to any one, and she steadfastly pared potatoes because she no longer cared to play. She was very glad of potatoes. But when those faithful

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vegetables were served with the other simple food, which at first had steamed so invitingly upon the long tables, Martha Mary had no appetite. Somewhere inside her was a weight, a sickening heaviness.

She would have been greatly surprised to know that Miss Maynard, too, was carrying a troubled heart. Martha Mary could never have dreamed how deeply it concerned the Kids' Lady because one little girl was grown dull-eyed and slow of step. When, about this time, school began, it was a relief to both of them. A relief to the woman because she hoped the new occupations and interests would furnish for Martha Mary a diversion and a stimulant, and to the child, because the school was some distance away from the Home, which meant a long walk in the dreaming days of amber sunshine. She liked to slip away at noon and morning before the other children started and go quietly by herself, and Miss Maynard humored her, since Martha Mary was always to be relied upon.

How could she suspect that Martha

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Mary, having small interest in her dinner one noon, and thereby starting for school unusually early, would make a wide detour to pass by a park? Or how could any one have foreseen that, having done this, the little girl would meet with a portentous adventure?

Immediately there sprang into Martha Mary's brain an invincible determination. The details of her enterprise she worked out deliberately in the next two days, but when it came to putting them into execution, her courage was near to failing.

Easy enough it seemed to fold up her few extra pieces of clothing and conceal them in her school bag, but the doing of it proved a tremendous task. Surely, never before, had any paper rattled with such a guilty sibilance as did that one printed sheet which she essayed to wrap about her little garments. Finally they were stowed away in the bottom of the bag with books on top, and then, how the paper kept crackling as she made her way out of the front door, ostensibly starting for school!

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But she did not go on down the walk; instead, she wandered vaguely to the back of the grounds. Beyond, in the garden, a dull-witted fellow was digging turnips. The mellow, brown earth fell away easily from the white and purple globes. The digger stopped, and, leaning on his fork, began to munch one of the crisp vegetables. Evidently he took no cognizance of Martha Mary; she began to breathe easier.

With as casual an air as she could command she walked across the yard to a bench which stood under a tree near the edge of a steep terrace. Here she seated herself, brushing away some of the yellow leaves that lay everywhere. All the while other leaves came balancing idly down, like flakes of sunshine as the morning light shone through them. There was nothing to prevent her departing, as she did every morning, for school, yet Martha Mary could not start.

Then, suddenly, her very breath stopped to listen; from the house some one was calling her. Twice, and a third time the voice

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of one of the teachers sounded through the still air. Doubtless she was wanted for some part of her work which had been forgotten. What she had done and what she had not done of her accustomed tasks that morning, she could not have told in the least.

But the call was the one touch needed to set her loose. Like a flash she was seated on the grass at the edge of the terrace. One jerk of her bag into her lap and she was coasting swiftly down the incline. The moment that her feet had touched the pavement, the impetus of her slide sent her on, and away she went, well out of sight in the lowered street, but still fleeing in an actual terror of pursuit. Even when she had reached unaccustomed ways she kept on running, her heavy bag slapping her thin leg and her head turning at every new sound to glance back over her shoulder.

CHAPTER XVI

TO THE TALL TIMBER

ADINSMORE PARK squirrel, who was patting down an acorn in the musky mold under a barberry bush, suddenly bobbed upright on his haunches and made a few emphatic and well-chosen remarks. His protest being quite unheeded, he took three curving leaps and shinned half way up the trunk of an oak tree. Then, being a park squirrel, and used to holding his ground against ubiquitous humans, he stopped flaunting an insolent tail, and continued his execrations.

It was all very well, of course, for people on business — men and women who had to go to work — to pass through the park in the early morning. They went rapidly crunching along the paths, intent upon their own affairs; they did not in the least disturb an industrious and self-respecting squirrel who

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was up and at work every morning at day-break in order to have his winter supplies well in cold storage. But this little girl who came pushing right through the thicket of shrubbery, even stooping to crawl under the prickly boughs of the squirrel's own barberry bush, this child was an intrusion and an impertinence. He had told her how he felt about it in perfectly adequate language, and she paid not the slightest attention, even seemed oblivious of his presence.

So, finally, he let fall his remonstrant tail, went slouching up the tree to the first horizontal limb, and, stretching himself comfortably along, let his legs hang down on either side of the branch. If a surcease from toil were to be forced upon him, he might as well relax and get the full benefit.

The child did not look up at him, though he tilted his head comfortably sidewise, to regard her fixedly and with a beady eye. A very plain child; there could be no doubt of that, even though the color of her hair was not so bad, being much the shade of his own tail. She appeared to have been in a

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great hurry about something. Her little chest heaved, and there was red between the round brown spots on her cheek. She sat down on the soft old leaves, under the shelter of the barberry bush, and just sat there. So long she sat that the squirrel was about making up his mind that if this small person was established right in the midst of his larder for the rest of the day, he might as well betake himself to other labors.

But just then she began to move about once more. Out of a hempen school-bag, big and frayed, she took a bundle wrapped in newspapers. This she laid to one side, drew two school books from the bag, and scraping away the rustling brown and tawny leaves, laid books and bag down flat, pushed the leaves over them again, until they were almost concealed, then seemed to contemplate her work.

The squirrel understood that. This girl creature was storing her property for winter. He was about to conceive a slight respect for her when she suddenly uncovered the articles and began to dig in the soft mold in good earnest. She easily ex-

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cavated a small hollow, then shoved in bag and books once more, covered them thoroughly this time, scattered leaves over the top, and regarded the result with evident satisfaction.

Not so the Dinsmore Park squirrel. He had seen acorn after acorn of his careful storing thrown heedlessly aside or buried in the earth beyond recovery. In high dudgeon and barking angrily, he went scratching up the tree's rough bark, clear to the top and leaping to the out-reaching branch of another tree, went bounding away through the topmost boughs, his indignant tail flapping like a sail behind him.

Such an outburst attracted the attention of even a preoccupied Martha Mary. She lifted her eyes to the sprightly thing that whisked so airily among the branches, regarded with unconscious envy his apparently untrammeled freedom; and then, quite oblivious of the fact that she had just overturned a vital part of his world, she sat down with a sigh at the foot of the oak and appeared to settle herself to wait.

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Quietly, for a long time, she remained in this nook among the bushes, while the sun, growing warmer, filtered down through the tree's thinning foliage to dance upon Martha Mary's blue dress and upon the flat-lying grass. The sound of passing feet and voices came now and then from the walks and driveways, but no one approached this refuge among the shrubbery.

At last, when she was sure it was well after 9 o'clock, she got up and wandered about the paths, strolled down by the fountain, watched the glimmering gold fish, and afterward diverted herself as best she could with the absurd posturings of an old pelican who had his abode on the edge of a pond. That queer bird must have been fixed in the opinion that children existed for the sole purpose of bringing him food. He pursued Martha Mary upon ineffectual legs, with suppliant, baggy beak; and she would have found him laughable, had her frame of mind been less serious.

Always she was watching the paths which led to the park entrances; with strained gaze

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she examined every one who approached, while varying shades of disappointment crossed her face. Finally there came slowly down the hill a slender, pretty woman, wheeling a baby-cab. At the first glimpse of her Martha Mary crimsoned, caught her breath, stood for a moment staring, then crossed deliberately to a bench beside the path and seated herself. No one, passing by, would have imagined that this little girl, who so calmly watched a pelican dawdling on the edge of a pond, was choking with anxiety and suspense.

When the crunching of gravel under small wheels told Martha Mary that the new-comers were nearly opposite, she turned casual eyes in that direction. The lady certainly was very pretty and elegant, and the perambulator was a fine affair, though it seemed heavy to push.

But it was the baby in the perambulator whom Martha Mary eyed hungrily from beneath lowered lids. He was a pink, plump, complacent baby, and his cap and coat were of white silk, heavy with em-

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broidery. His blue eyes were regarding the universe in drowsy approbation, but when his gaze fell upon the little girl on the park bench, his face lighted, he bounced in his cab until the springs teetered up and down; he struggled against the beribboned strap which held him in, and he laughed aloud with absurd chirpings and chucklings, while he threw himself backward and forward, at the same time reaching out eager arms, unmistakably extended toward Martha Mary.

The lady stopped and came around in front of the baby, where she lifted him up and tucked him down, and executed various small manœuvres supposed to add to the comfort of infants. All of which did not in the least distract his attention. He still continued to wave his arms and chuckle at Martha Mary; and, finding no heed was being paid to his manifestations, feeling indeed that his coach was beginning to move on, he introduced a threatening squeal into his performance.

A trifle doubtfully the lady scrutinized

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Martha Mary, and then smiled. The little girl looked clean.

"He is always so fond of other children," she explained, as she lifted him from his wrappings and brought him over to the bench. She sat down at the end, while the little girl timidly moved to the farther corner. But this by no means satisfied the baby. Still he squirmed and fretted, eagerly he reached and cooed.

"Do you like babies?" questioned the lady, thinking that this must be a very unimpressionable girl.

"Yes 'm," replied Martha Mary, demurely. She had an instinct that to appear too eager might spoil everything. Happy was doing enough for both of them. The triumphant joy of this moment was like to suffocate Martha Mary, but her face was as impassive as an Oriental's. It was not for nothing that she had laid these plans — desperate plans she felt them to be, and she had the courage of desperation.

When in that momentous noon hour a few days before, she had first approached

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this park, it had been with no especial motive. The city had many parks, and out and in the gateways of these pleasant, tree-shadowed places passed many women who trundled before them baby-cabs with their ever interesting burdens. Perhaps, for that reason, had Martha Mary been drawn to this spot, and certainly her eyes were very keen for babies. So keen they were that at a distance of half a block from one of those perambulated infants, she had stopped in her tracks so abruptly that she fairly jumped backward. The perambulator, the lady who slowly propelled it, and the baby's attire were completely unknown to her, but at a much greater distance Martha Mary would have known that baby. She turned quite sick with the shock of it, and as soon as she could collect herself sufficiently to get her feet started, she hurried down a side street.

But the next day at the same hour she was watching in the same place, and there, sure enough, out of the same gateway came the lady, the perambulator and the baby!

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It was then she began to make her plans; now she was carrying them through.

After what she thought a sufficient interval, and when she knew by indications that Happy was preparing for a protest which would command his entire attention and that of every one else for a considerable period of time, she proffered a gentle suggestion.

"I could take the baby a few minutes, if you're tired. I'm real used to babies."

Since her hands seemed to have been washed quite recently (that had been done at the fountain of the gold fish) the lady agreed tentatively; at least, she bent slightly forward along the bench, and loosened her arms.

Happy had grown a strong boy; he gave a leap from that confining embrace, and the lady cried out; but at the same instant Martha Mary's practised arms had caught him. She held him steady though he was executing a triumphant but startlingly uncertain dance upon her narrow lap, while he fairly shrieked with delight and made

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gleeful clutches for her hair. But Martha Mary held her head well back out of his reach, as she smiled upon him with a sagely tempered reserve. When he had somewhat subsided, and she had him seated on her lap in the curve of a motherly arm, the lady spoke again:

“ You seem to be used to babies.”

“ Oh, yes ’m; I took care of one a long time. He ’s gone away now.”

Suddenly Martha Mary’s eyes filled with tears. She blinked them back in dismay; tears had not been in her program, but they served a purpose. The lady melted.

“ Oh, I hope the baby did n’t die!” Her tone was compassionate.

“ No ’m,” said Martha Mary, smiling in swift transition. “ He ain’t coming back, though. I got to find a new place.”

“ Have you?” said the lady. Martha Mary imagined she said it consideringly.

“ Yes ’m,” the child went on, pursuing her fancied advantage. “ I ’m going to stay with a lady across the park here till I get a new place. The lady ain’t expecting

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me, either. I don't know as she 'll be real glad; she 's got a good many."

Martha Mary paused, in amaze at her own facility of invention. Her natural perpendicularity had kept her, for the most part, in simple paths of truth. Having usually been equal to a situation, she had found no need of evasions. But now she was tasting the intoxication of a newly discovered talent, and would have liked to go on "making up." In response to the stimulus of a sympathetic listener, all manner of interesting details popped into consciousness, with a vividness which almost convinced her of their reality. But her native shrewdness warned her in time; she changed the subject.

"Might I wheel the baby around, a while?" she asked. "I ain't in any hurry."

The lady willingly assented, and sat looking on while the baby was deftly rearranged in his chariot. Untiringly he was perambulated up and down all the near-by walks; he was formally introduced to the

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pelican ; he was initiated into the delights of watching for the glister of gold fish in the basin of the fountain ; and always he was guarded with care against possible accident, unfailingly he was treated with the deference due his social position, while the lady sat at her ease ; and, observing all this, looked pleased.

Very well pleased she must have been ; for when she left the park an hour later, Martha Mary was still with her and wheeling the perambulator. Happy was comfortably asleep, and he would have been even more content, could he have known that the newspaper parcel going along with him in the bottom of his cab, contained his sister's wardrobe. Two new frocks she had already been promised, and the proper nurse-maid's caps to go with them. Martha Mary was having queer sensations, there was a light feeling in her feet, as though she were stepping in time to music.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

THE door bell rang! Since the disappearance of Martha Mary from the Home, that tingling whirr, each time it came, shrilled always the same thought into the mind of the Kids' Lady. She had been immediately concerned on that day when there was no shining red head at the dinner table. Questions evoked the information that the child had not appeared at school that forenoon, though it was established by sufficient testimony that she was known to have started. What could possibly have happened to a wise little Martha Mary, taking her quiet way along the streets of a September morning? When no solution offered itself, the Kids' Lady was greatly alarmed. She set on foot inquiries, the interest of the various officers of juvenile court was enlisted, even policemen were in-

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structed to keep an eye out for a wiry little girl with red braids and freckles, or an ear open for possible news of her. But perhaps the policemen were not over-zealous; there were so many small girls with red braids in the city. Certainly, no one produced any tidings, and efforts soon lapsed.

Miss Maynard had more than one disturbed night trying to persuade herself that, at least, no misfortune could have befallen the child or something would surely have been discovered. The persistence of her anxiety had come to be almost a vexation. Sunshine and George Johnny, with the supremely innocent selfishness of very young children, took their sister's continued absence quite philosophically, and Miss Maynard sometimes wished she could share their light-hearted indifference. But any sound of unusual voices, or a summons from the bell, continued to spur her instant attention; and now, since she happened to be passing through the hall, she opened the door herself.

She was not precisely surprised to see be-

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fore her Mrs. Addison, smiling her assured little smile. Beside the lady stood her chauffeur, and in his arms was Happy, whom he promptly handed over to Miss Maynard as if the baby were a package to be returned.

"It is hardly worth while to come in," began Mrs. Addison, in her pretty breathless way. "Well, just for a moment, then. I hope it won't be inconvenient, having the baby brought back unannounced like this. Indeed, I meant to 'phone you yesterday, but I really have n't had a minute I could call my own.

"After all, it was a fortunate thought of yours that we should take the baby only for a visit. You see, the business of the firm requires Mr. Addison's presence in South America, perhaps for quite a little time. He insists upon my going with him, and we shall be moving about a good deal. I suppose we could take a baby with us, doubtless people do, but we thought it would n't be best. The child is so perfectly well now, it would be a pity to subject him to anything upsetting, would n't it? I have had

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a little nurse girl for him, such a homely little thing, but nice, too. I really even considered taking them both along. But it complicates matters so, does n't it?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Miss Maynard, rather coolly. She was holding Happy on her lap with both arms around him, as if he were a very welcome guest.

"Yes, it does, frightfully. And you know when I told Estelle yesterday that I intended bringing the baby back this morning, she disappeared at once, never said a word to me about going, just dropped out of sight, though she knew I was so busy getting ready to go away that I had hardly seen the baby for days. I had quite put myself out to be kind to her, too."

Miss Maynard, untying Happy's cap, paused with the ribbons in her fingers:

"Was it the nurse girl," she asked, "whose name was Estelle?"

"Yes, so absurd! A most snubby-nosed, red-haired little thing! But the baby fancied her quite amazingly. I must be going. I am so rushed." She fluttered a scented

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little kiss upon Happy's cheek. "Good-by, you nice baby. I should so have loved to keep him, Miss Maynard, but life does make such sudden demands upon one, does n't it? I hope he will find a lovely home soon. I am sure he will. I have had a charming time with him, and I thank you so much."

The Kids' Lady was visibly preoccupied. She opened her lips to speak, then thought better of it. Mrs. Addison felt that her manner was markedly peculiar.

"You quite understand, don't you, how I was placed about the baby?"

"Oh, certainly; yes, of course. You said, I believe, that you had no idea where the nurse girl had gone? and she had red hair?"

"Yes, she was most unornamental. Where she is? I don't know in the least, but then it does n't matter now. I really must be going."

She glided away, and Miss Maynard, turning from the door, gazed deep into the baby's seraphic eyes:

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“Happy,” she demanded, “where *is* Martha Mary?”

Happy leaned away over, with a great expenditure of effort, as if he were going to look for his lost relative upon the floor, but instead he only pulled off his slipper and flung it from him exultingly. He knew a great deal, did Happy; he knew almost as much as the Dinsmore Park squirrel, but neither of them were ever going to tell. Martha Mary had the telling to do and it was not easy. She put it off as long as possible.

Supper was over and it was quite dark when the Kids’ Lady opened the door upon the broad porch and walked to the top of the steps, where she stood a few moments breathing the frosty air, and looking off into the blue darkness, prickling with stars above the glow of the city’s lights.

As she turned to go in, there caught her eye, in the corner of one of the porch benches, a darker shadow. Quickly she went closer, stooped down, and laid her hand upon a little shoulder that shivered.

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Instantly she grasped the small arm.

“Come in this minute, where it’s warm!” she commanded.

Without a glance downward she hustled the child through the hall and into the office, then backed her up against a warm radiator.

“Martha Mary, where did you stay last night?”

“Id the bark,” confessed the girl, and as she spoke she caught her breath and put a hand to her breast.

“Is there a pain in your chest?”

Martha Mary nodded in shame, and the Kids’ Lady set her lips.

Fifteen minutes later all that was visible of the returned sinner was a sort of tepee of blankets, from an aperture of which peeped out a countenance so perspiringly red that the freckles were quite obliterated. Martha Mary’s eyes were full of tears which were amply justified by the double strength of the ginger tea she gulped dutifully, and her feet were tingling in a mustard bath of fully equal vigor.

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If there had been anything to say, there was no chance to say it until Miss Maynard was tucking Martha Mary into a heated bed. Then, as some pungent oil was being swiftly rubbed on her breast, the child lifted weighted eyelids:

“I did ‘ud *wad* to be bad,” she articulated thickly.

Suddenly, the Kids’ Lady drew up the blankets and turned away. When she came back she brought a folded flannel, which she laid, all hot and prickly, clear up to the moist little chin.

“Martha Mary,” she said, sternly, “if you ever do such awful things any more I shall — I shall soak your feet again!”

CHAPTER XVIII

CONTEMPT OF COURT

ACOLD on your lungs, with edgy possibilities of pneumonia, and hot and sticky actualities of fever, nasty sweet medicine, and curious, shifty aches, is not commonly considered in the light, either of a solace or a diversion. Yet to the Kids' Lady and Martha Mary the illness which kept the child in bed for a week brought with it no small sense of relief. It was greatly easier for Miss Maynard to have only Martha Mary's bodily needs to consider, and to be able for a time to put aside any thought of the more perplexing problems which were bound to loom up again in the future. As for the little girl, she rested very contentedly in the gentle tendance which sickness brought her. She felt forgiven, and that was a sensation which it was just as well to enjoy, even though she was

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by no means clear in her mind that she had actually done wrong.

Miss Maynard was almost equally doubtful on that point, but the fact remained that Martha Mary had run away, and the maintenance of discipline required that she must be in some manner dealt with. As for the precise method by which justice should be meted out, the Kids' Lady could not seem to come to any decision. She concluded finally to leave the matter to Judge Sunderland, since he made a profession of decisions. Had she realized with what terror this arrangement struck Martha Mary, she would, perhaps, have done otherwise.

Going to court, on the former occasion, had been to the little girl merely a pleasantly titillating and rather agreeably important excursion into the unknown. But this time she would be one of the offenders, accused of having done wrong, of having broken rules. She had liked the Judge before. She remembered how there had been in his eyes, when he regarded her, a sort of you 're-a-funny-little-girl kind of look. But she

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certainly was not a funny little girl any more. Her desperate adventure had appeared to her most solemn and startling at the time she embarked upon it; since then she had been given time to grow used to the idea, but now, with her crime come up for judgment, she magnified her offense with all the unreasoning intensity of childhood. Yet Miss Maynard had said, so gently:

“I think on Monday morning I shall take you with me to see Judge Sunderland. I believe, Martha Mary, we had better ask him what arrangements we can make next.”

And that quiet speech had cast one little girl into outer darkness. It had been a Saturday evening when the Kids’ Lady spoke those words, and though Martha Mary slept that night, it was to start awake over and over in the clutch of strangling fears.

What a length of time elapsed before Monday! During the dragging afternoon of Sunday, it popped into Martha Mary’s head queerly that it was a pity the Sabbath was not a working day. It seemed to her that every bit of work there ever was in all

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the world could have been put tidily out of the way in those interminably drawn-out hours between breakfast and supper.

But she said nothing. More and more was she learning to say nothing ; and the less she said, and the more she thought, the farther away slipped her confidence in anything ahead to be desired. Worn out with her own half feverish imaginings, she had reached a state of almost comfortable apathy by the time she was filing, with a small company of juveniles, into the room where Judge Sunderland held court.

The out-door air had been sharp with the early morning chill of late October, and the steam-heated room, long and narrow as a Pullman car, was palpitatingly hot. By the time the stumbling flock of the Kids' Lady had been herded into chairs adjacent to the Judge's long table, Martha Mary began to feel sleepy. Gradually the further end of the room, outside the rail, filled up with spectators, parents and complainants. A man with a metal star attached to his vest and a-glisten under his open coat, came from an

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inner room, carrying an enormous, calf-bound book, which he opened upon the table with a leathery whack. Three ladies stepped questioningly in from the tiled hallway, looked about, spoke together in an undertone; then the man with the star opened the spindled gate in the railing, and gave them chairs at the corner of the table, with a way as though he wanted to be very polite.

One of the ladies had her spectacles fastened to a gold stick, and when she wanted to see anything she had to hold them up in a tightly gloved hand and tip her head side-wise. It looked a great deal of bother, but Martha Mary felt sure she did it because she wanted to.

Over against the railing leaned a girl who attracted the lady's notice. The girl's shoulders hung with a sullenly childish droop, but she was older than a child, yet not old enough, Martha Mary decided, to be a sure enough young lady. Certainly her white furs were very dirty, but as for the cavernous hat, with its hanging yellow plume, the little girl thought that wonder-

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fully beautiful. Perhaps the tightly gloved lady thought so, too, and maybe that is why she kept her spectacles up in front of her eyes. The girl hunched up a furry shoulder, and half turned away. Martha Mary wondered what she had cried about so long that her face was red and swollen all over. Quite suddenly Martha Mary wanted to stick out her tongue at that lady with the spectacles on a gold stick; and then, almost as suddenly, the child felt a prickle under her hair and a tingle down her back; the Judge was coming.

He swung into the room as if he had got under motion on a long walk and had not yet slowed down. The Judge had spectacles, too, and was scouring them rigorously with a clean handkerchief. Passing the windows he held the lenses to the light, then took hold of the bows and ducked his head between them, like a horse plunging his head into a feed-bag. While seating himself in his big chair, he was hooking the gold wires over his ears, and with a forceful jerk he pulled himself and the chair both forward,

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rested his arms on the end of the table, said "Good morning" all around as if he did not know anybody, and then the business of court began.

Case after case was heard. Each time Martha Mary was expecting her name to be called, and as each time she was disappointed, her attention presently wandered. Beyond the row of long windows, she could see, spread far below, the jagged jumble of walls and roofs and chimneys. Netted with wires and feathered with half bare trees, the city seemed to reach on and out, quite to the place where the sky bent down. The whole tangle of colors and shapes was harmonized and hovered over by a haze of pinky brown, that tender russet transformation which the sunlight of a frosty autumn morning knows how to weave out of befouling smoke, acrid dust and all the noisome exhalations of a crowding, moiling humanity.

From all this Martha Mary derived two sensations: it was pretty and she did not like it. Pretty, because it lay like a sun-gilt picture, but uncomfortable, because it made

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her feel so little. Before that immensity Martha Mary's soul shriveled. She was homesick for any kind of place where you could be walled about, shut in, and where you did not have to look away off and see how terrifyingly big was the world.

Half subdued laughter brought her back to the faces circling the long table, and now all were turned toward a diminutive figure in a chair next His Honor. The culprit was a very little boy of five, dimply and rose-lipped, with brown eyes raised to the Judge in the bewilderment of an aggrieved cherub. His mother, beside him, vacillated between outraged dignity and vexed amusement. The complainant, a bristle-faced rag-picker, maintained diffusely and with righteous heat that rubber tubing of value had been abstracted from his cart by the arraigned infant. He glared angrily when the levity rose.

Bending forward, the Judge brought his smiling eyes nearer the level of the little boy.

“And how long,” he questioned gravely, “have you been in the junk business?”

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The child looked at his mother, who bridled and smiled at the Judge. The mirth bubbled up once more, and Martha Mary turned away. They made her tired.

But later, even she felt amused at the half coherent vociferations of a truck peddler. This tousled and bearded fellow bore, as testimony to his injuries, a partially healed cut on the back of his head. A rock hurled after him, he protested, had done that, and he darted vengeful glances at the two impish-looking youngsters whom he held responsible.

"Yes, zur, Judge, zur," he declared with much waving of arms, "dey says always ouldt loud, 'Sheeny! Sheeny!' an' dey push me de stone from behindt!"

As the peddler sat down, Martha Mary lost interest again, and she jumped in her chair when her name was now called. Moving to a seat nearer the Judge, put her beside the Kids' Lady, and it helped a great deal when the Kids' Lady gave her a smile.

Apparently some one must have told the

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Judge all about what she had done; at least, he asked no questions. A moment he looked at her, and then he said, slowly:

“I was disappointed in you, Martha Mary.”

This statement, appearing to require no answer, the little girl did not make any. In miserable silence she sat waiting for the Judge to continue; but finally, when the waiting became intolerable, she choked, swallowed hard and said:

“Yes, sir.”

“I realize, perfectly, the temptation you had to follow the baby,” His Honor continued, “but I think you should have trusted to Miss Maynard to know what was best. Don’t you think you should have asked Miss Maynard whether you might apply for that position as nurse to the baby?”

“She would n’t of let me,” stated Martha Mary, simply.

The Judge liked Martha Mary; his voice was still kind.

“But if Mrs. Addison understood how well you could take care of him; if it had

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been explained to her that you were the baby's sister — ”

“ Then *she* would n't of let me.”

His Honor cleared his throat.

“ However that may be,” he went on, “ you will certainly have to learn to depend upon the judgment of people who are much older than you, upon the judgment of people who are trying to arrange matters as seems to them wisest. Surely you must know, Martha Mary, that we will not see any of your little family placed, except with people who will be good to you.”

The little girl had been sitting stiffly upon the edge of her chair ; now she leaned back with a sigh, and when she spoke she looked straight at the Judge, while her voice, small and old, seemed to come from dry years of disillusion.

“ I'm so tired of being arranged ! ” she said. “ I don't want to be done good to.”

The smile in the room came dangerously near to being overheard. The lady with the gold stick lifted it and regarded the Judge through her glasses with evidence of

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highly pleasurable interest. He may not have seen her; at least, he looked only at the Kids' Lady.

"There's a great deal on the docket this morning, Miss Maynard," he said, in his most judicial voice. "Since I want to have a talk with Martha Mary, we shall take up this case again after luncheon. What's next?" he concluded, turning to the probation officer.

If Martha Mary had been guilty of contempt of court, she remained in fortunate ignorance of her misdemeanor. So, when she faced the Judge again some three hours later, she was much less troubled than before. This time they two and the Kids' Lady had a small side-room to themselves; and for this absence of on-lookers, especially for deliverance from the lady with the gold stick, Martha Mary was grateful.

His Honor sat in a deep low chair, and, with elbows on his knees, he contemplatively regarded the little girl. Finally he reached forward, and taking one of the small, un-

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resisting hands, he laid it in his big palm and looked down at it, saying at last:

“ Little girl, are n’t you ever going to be willing that we should help you to take care of your family? If it happens that we find a good home for the baby, are n’t you going to be unselfish enough to say that he may have it? ”

Martha Mary waited a minute.

“ *You* would n’t if it was your baby,” she said.

Dropping the little hand, the Judge slid down in his chair, and, shoving his fists deep into his pockets, pondered with knotted eyebrows and protruding under lip. He was past middle age, but he had never lost the vision which stays long in the minds of all good men. Sometimes it is difficult to remember that you are a judge.

The Kids’ Lady broke the silence.

“ I have a plan, Judge Sunderland, which would please me; but I have hesitated about suggesting it, perhaps because it does please me. You know Martha Mary is extremely industrious and competent, and she has a

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remarkable way with children. Out at the Home we need more help in the nursery, and what she could do might make it possible for us to get along without the assistant nurse I have felt we must have."

The Judge looked up, his frown melting away, while Miss Maynard softly continued:

"For the next few months — for the winter, say — if she would work very hard before and after school, could n't her services be considered as an equivalent for the board of this little family at the Home? Now that we 're in the new building, and no longer crowded, it seems that we might well enough accommodate them —"

Miss Maynard paused, then quietly added:

"I should like very much to have the help of Martha Mary."

"Well, why not, why not?" said the Judge brusquely. "If you want it that way, I see no reason why any one should complain." He turned to the little girl with a teasing gleam in his eye. "Since you

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have such decided opinions, young woman — since you have such decided opinions, what do *you* think about it? ”

Martha Mary shyly smiled at him.

“ I think it’s a good — arrangement,” she answered.

Then, under the table’s edge, her hand slipped along and slid into the warm hand of the Kids’ Lady.

CHAPTER XIX

A REJECTED PROPOSAL

ALL the windows of the nursery were wide open to the warm western sun of an April afternoon. Small breezes came whiffing in, fluttering aside the white curtains, and roving about the room, laden with all sorts of tales of springing grass and leafing trees. One of these breezes had discovered a budding lilac bush in the back yard, and had flown to the nursery on purpose to tell of it. Without a doubt the children got the message, for they laughed even more gaily, as they frolicked upon the floor, while the babies in their white cribs batted about with active uncertain fists and uttered squeaks of glee.

Loudest of all laughed Elvira, who could exceed even the volatile Sunshine in merriment. For, in the veins of Elvira, rioted a potent strain of African blood, and she was

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of a lovely, smooth yellowish color, like the back of a lady's tan kid glove.

Just now Sunshine distinguished herself by a perfect shriek of joy, which brought all the others crowding to the window with Martha Mary looking over their heads.

“Wed boid! Wed boid!” was the way Sunshine announced the marvel, though the shy visitor, perched upon the farthest end of a roof spout, was of the hue of sapphire. Such an outburst of acclaim was too much even for a city blue bird. He went dipping away upon skyey wings, while Martha Mary turned to other amusements for her flock.

To watch her with the children, sitting upon the floor to be near as many as possible, was almost to forget that they were in any way in misfortune. Such a gay play-fellow she was for games and laughter; yet such a tender small mother for woes and tears. In these few months of security Martha Mary had wonderfully gentled, both without and within. A quaint surpliced frock of dull blue, gave to her childish angles a promise of what might some day be

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a lithe grace. Her hair was darkening, and the coppery braids were fastened around her head with soft ribbons. The freckles still remained, uncompromisingly freckly, but the skin between the brown dots and on forehead, neck and chin, was clear with the whiteness of pearl. Now and then, regarding the child, the Kids' Lady felt an odd sense of triumph. Perhaps, after all, Martha Mary was not going to be entirely unattractive to look at. Certainly it was a face both sweet and merry that turned now toward the opening door.

"Judge Sunderland is downstairs," announced the nurse who entered. "He wants to see you."

"Yes 'm," Martha Mary's tone was untroubled; apprehension had come to be a thing of the past. Besides, the Judge's visits to the Home were not infrequent, and they never portended anything but good. She ran quickly down the steps, in danger of violating with her stout shoes a cherished, though not very efficacious, regulation against unnecessary noise. When she

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brought up in the doorway of the office she was still smiling.

“Come in! Come in!” called out His Honor from where he sat talking with Miss Maynard. He extended a broad palm and when he had hold of Martha Mary’s hand, he drew her over beside his chair.

“Now, then, how is that nurseryful upstairs? Some pretty mean children up there, I suppose?”

“Oh, no, sir, no!” Martha Mary’s face was gravely intense. “They’re always good and they’re so darling, darling —!”

“Sh-h-h!” the Judge threatened her with lifted hands. “Don’t try to describe those babies. I wanted to talk some myself.”

The little girl flushed rosily. The Judge always bothered her this funny way, and laughed with his eyes. Every time he did it her face grew warm, but somehow her heart grew warm at the same time, and she felt both good and happy. Without the smallest reservation now, Martha Mary liked the Judge; she was equally sure that the Judge liked her.

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Miss Maynard being called away, His Honor put the little girl into the vacated chair opposite him.

“I ’ll tell you how it is, Martha Mary,” he began confidentially. “You see, Miss Maynard and I have no right to go on indefinitely, keeping you and your little family here without making any effort to find homes for you. This is merely a Detention Home, and must be kept for that purpose. On the other hand there is a mighty slim chance of finding a place where you children could all be together. It takes some courage to adopt a family of five, though it has been done. And, anyhow, I take it you would rather hoe your own row if you could, would n’t you? ”

“Oh, I ’d heaps liefer,” Martha Mary sighed.

“Yes, of course, of course. You are that kind of a girl. How old are you, by the way? ”

“I ’ll be fourteen come next August.” She stated it with demure dignity.

“That is getting along in years, is n’t

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it?" The Judge was exceedingly serious.

"Yes, sir, it is," agreed Martha Mary.

"You know, after you are fourteen," the Judge continued, wiping his glasses, "you are not obliged to go to school, but I should n't like to think of your terminating your education at this point. However, we need n't worry about that now. Vacation begins before long, and I have thought seriously of setting you up in housekeeping."

Housekeeping! The word encompassed visions for Martha Mary. Her eyes grew bluer and shining.

The Judge was also a trifle irradiant; evidently his project pleased him.

"Of course you ought to have some kind of a business. Something you could do and still not be away from the children. I've been thinking of a flower shop with a few rooms at the back."

His Honor brought forth this idea rather triumphantly, but the little girl made no response.

"Later in the season we might have to put in fruit, too. I'm sure you'd make a

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capital business woman." Then, as the child still did not speak, "Well, what do you think about it?"

"I don't know, sir." Martha Mary's tone was not sanguine; it was barely interested.

His Honor felt distinctly vexed. He would not have allowed any one to intimate that this little girl was either wilful or stubborn, and he knew she was not ungrateful; but he did think it would be quite as well if her mind were a bit more open to suggestion.

"So you don't like the idea?" he said, and in his tone was a touch of asperity.

"Oh, yes, sir! Yes, I do," Martha Mary hastened to make her peace. "It would be awful pretty to sell flowers, but I did n't know — you see, Miss Maynard told me maybe there'd be something I could do. I'd talked about it to Jakey's widow."

"'Jakey's widow?'" growled the Judge.

"Yes, sir. The widow lady where Jakey lives at. Mis' Phelps, her name is. Miss Maynard lets us go see her an' Jakey some-

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times. She ain't a rich lady at all; she 's a real nice lady. She don't live so far from where we used to be."

" Well?" The Judge was waiting.

" Yes, sir. An' so we said, what could I do? We thought about ice cream." This last very timidly.

" Ice cream!" The Judge's tone forever abolished that commodity. " Why, child, that 's an expensive outfit! It takes capital. It 's out of the question."

Martha Mary looked dismayed, but she went on:

" Oh, we did n't mean like that, not like that at all. We meant ice cream for poor folks. You see, flowers is something rich folks likes to buy, but ice cream is something poor folks has *got* to have."

" Well, I don't know about that," His Honor demurred.

" But they *do*." Martha Mary's eyes grew big and earnest. " When it gets so awful hot down there at night, an' all the kids is hot an' cross, an' their mothers is all tired out, seems like they just got to have

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it. They buys an' buys it, off the peddlers, an' it makes 'em sick, cause it 's made dirty. Miss Maynard says it is. She says it kills the little kids, just kills 'em, when good ice cream would n't hurt a mite!"

"Hm-m-m-m," her friend regarded her ruminatingly. "I don't know but maybe you might, now. Could you make it, though?"

"Jakey's widow would help me. She said she would."

"But I don't see how you 'd get the stuff around. A push cart is heavy."

Evidently Martha Mary had an idea on this subject, also, but the thought of it seemed to embarrass her. She blushed and looked down. His Honor pressed the question:

"Had you thought about that?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Martha Mary. Then, "Don't laugh," she begged. "We did have a dog. We gave him to the butcher's boy to keep for us. Jakey says the butcher's boy has learnt him to be hitched up. He don't drive just like he ought to.

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If you 're behind him he turns right around and comes backwards, but Sunshine and George Johnny could lead him."

" You mean you thought of taking him into the ice cream business? " questioned the Judge with earnest demeanor.

" Yes, sir. To pull a little wagon. I thought he could. Could n't he? He 's real big, now, an' he 's a awful nice dog."

Then the Judge did laugh, shamelessly, with a laugh that was full-lunged and of embarrassing duration. Martha Mary laughed, too, but hers was rather an hysterical giggle.

When His Honor straightened up again, he said with emphasis:

" Martha Mary, you 're a born advertiser! "

Precisely what he meant was not quite clear to the little girl, but she knew he was not displeased, for during the rest of his call he chuckled deeply at intervals.

When he left, he shook hands with her as if she were grown up.

" I am going to back your enterprise,

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Martha Mary," he declared, "but the most important detail I shall leave you to attend to. Be sure that you definitely engage that dog."

CHAPTER XX

BLITHELY ON HER BUSINESS

JUNE had come. Not a country June, crimson-sweet with roses and strawberries and clover, while tree shadows turn into green caves of coolness, and gold-dusted bees go sing-songing all day long of hives and honey and the hearts of flowers; nor June in the fine, broad, city streets of pompous residences, with whisking mists of water keeping the lawns washed fresh around blooming urns, glowing borders and the shining leaves of vines, but June in the crowded districts of the town, where the sun scorches a fierce menace almost as soon as working people are wearily awake, and only goes glowering down behind the buildings at night, after he has burned into walls and pavements heat enough to keep the narrow spaces palpitant until he comes blazing out again. It was

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June of exhausted bodies, of edged tempers,
of ailing little children.

On one of the most humidly hot of these long, bright evenings, came walking down a short street which turned into the poorer quarters of the city, a big, broad-shouldered, square-faced man. Beside him was a free-stepping, graceful woman, who indicated various points in passing, and smiled as she talked. The street possessed many quaint features, having once been the fashionable residence district when the town was new. It still kept some traces of its former state, in the gracious elms that bordered it and in the few detached houses which had not yet given way to more space-economizing structures.

One of these, a brick building topped with a streaked and rusty mansard roof, like a battered crown, appeared to be renewing its youth in a freshly green lawn spread on either hand of its paintless steps. Along the side fence twine was strung, up and down in taut zigzags, for the encouragement of a row of valiant young nasturtiums

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which were making bold promises with their bluish green discs of leaves. The long front windows were open and were genteelly guarded within by white lace curtains, pushed back to admit the air, but still hanging stiffly in the pride of fresh starch.

“From the appearance of her home, I infer that ‘Jakey’s widow’ makes the best of what she has,” observed Judge Sunderland. As he spoke he slipped a hand under Miss Maynard’s elbow to help her up the porch steps. Not that she needed any assistance, but because he had done that for his mother so many years that now he could never get over the habit.

“She does more than that,” replied the Kids’ Lady. “She makes the best of what she has n’t.”

A quick tread answered His Honor’s knock upon the open door, and a cheerful voice came down the hallway, even before its owner was fully visible.

“Now if that ain’t a shame! And all the children gone this hour ago!” Commenting in this fashion upon her guests’ arrival,

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the owner of the voice came forward toward the light; a neat, round figure in gray calico. When she reached the door she began her greeting more conventionally:

“Good evening, Miss Maynard, and Judge Sunderland, sir. It’s a downright shame the children ain’t any of ‘em here. They get off early, now. The route is getting so busy they have to. Deary me! I don’t know as I can say there ain’t *any* of ‘em here.”

This last was evoked by the appearance at her side of a small, pink presence, who had evidently come patting close behind her skirts upon soft, bare feet. Happy, in pink gingham rompers, was a study in wild rose tints.

“Ain’t he growing fine?” she questioned, as she lifted him proudly against the plump curve of her hip. “Will you come in, or would sitting out here suit you? I’ll fetch some chairs.”

“Oh, here, by all means!” As she spoke Miss Maynard held out her arms for the baby. And when the chairs had been

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brought, carried by Judge Sunderland, after all, the Kids' Lady was so pleasantly occupied that the Judge and "Jakey's widow" had most of the conversation to themselves, unless the baby's confident but unintelligible essays at language, and Miss Maynard's soft laughter thereat could be dignified by such a term.

"Yes, indeed, Judge," Mrs. Phelps was saying, "the business is doing fine — beyond anything I expected. Why, some nights now they can't hardly get any of the ice cream down to the poor folks, where Martha Mary wants to sell it. We've bought a third freezer, too, but since people on the streets near here have found out it's real homemade, with cream in it, they fairly buy the wagon out before it gets started."

"Great! Great doings!" There was hearty pleasure in His Honor's voice. "One of these days we shall be having to increase our transportation facilities."

"Yes, sir, I should n't wonder. They used to take a different way every trip, but now they stick to the same street till they

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get below Twelfth. That makes it go farther."

As she finished speaking, Mrs. Phelps turned in the direction of the baby. With the evening impulse of frolic, Happy was growing hilarious. "I ought to put that young man to bed, Miss Maynard," she said. "It's past his time now, and he'll be getting cross. I've got him pretty well trained, and I don't like to have it to do over again; so if you'll just excuse me—" She rose to take the child, and then added:

"Would n't you like to see the children's rooms? They think they are fixed up fine. They have the three this side of the hall."

Despite the pressure of business cares, the two back rooms were comfortably neat. After their inspection Mrs. Phelps ushered her guests to the front room, and apologized for closing the door between, since quiet was necessary to get the baby settled. The two were thus left to inspect that apartment in detail. It held a nondescript outfit, the donations of the charitably inclined. The rug was maroon, the table-spread blue,

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a cushioned chair red, and the sofa-bed a slightly impaired but still perfectly straightforward green.

“Where *ever* do you suppose that came from?” asked Miss Maynard. She was looking up at a strip of worsted work, framed like a picture, which hung above the door. The colors were yellow, red and purple, fortunately somewhat tamed by time, but still demanding persistently, “What is Home Without a Mother?”

“I suspect that is one of the donations,” commented the Kids’ Lady. “And I also suspect that Martha Mary thinks it beautiful. It is rather pathetic, here, but I don’t know, after all. Martha Mary makes an admirable mother. I think she was born a mother. Motherhood is largely a state of mind.”

“And,” the Judge added softly, “a condition of heart.”

He had been looking about the room where open picture-books lay on the table, a headless doll sprawled half off the window-ledge, and the cushions on the lounge were

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still whacked flat by the impact of solid, romping little bodies.

"This may not be a very pretty room," he continued, "but it *is* a home. I don't suppose you have any idea what that means to a man like me."

The Kids' Lady turned to the window suddenly. "Is n't that the children coming?" she said. "Yes, it is." And she went out into the hall to meet them.

They were already starting in from the street, George Johnny being left at the curb to guard Mark, who, temporarily relieved of responsibility, had lain down in the traces. Martha Mary's pleasure at sight of the callers was considerably overshadowed by her business zeal.

"It's just going dandy, Miss Maynard," she called out. "Just dandy!" Then, to Mrs. Phelps: "I guess we've got 'em about filled up down that street now. We can get down as far as 'Leventh, this time."

Judge Sunderland and Jakey bore out the full freezer between them. It was painted a riotous scarlet, and the wagon was the

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same hue. There was even a red ribbon bow, slightly stringy, which tied a bell about the dog's neck. When the load was settled, the dependable George Johnny picked up the leading strap, while Mark, in plainly bored obedience, got yawningly upon his awkward legs. And so the little cavalcade started forth once more.

Sunshine, not being essential to the business, elected to remain behind; Martha Mary walked sedately beside the wagon, very neat in her white apron, a new market basket on her arm, filled with crisp, pastry cones and covered by a fresh towel. Jakey had the responsible position of cashier and bodyguard.

Watching them go, His Honor smiled more and more. He was thinking many things. Only a few years now, before Martha Mary would be a woman, and what a woman she would be! What a link she would make with the people he wanted most to reach! A day nursery, right in this neighborhood, now, would fill a great need; there might be a pure milk depot, in con-

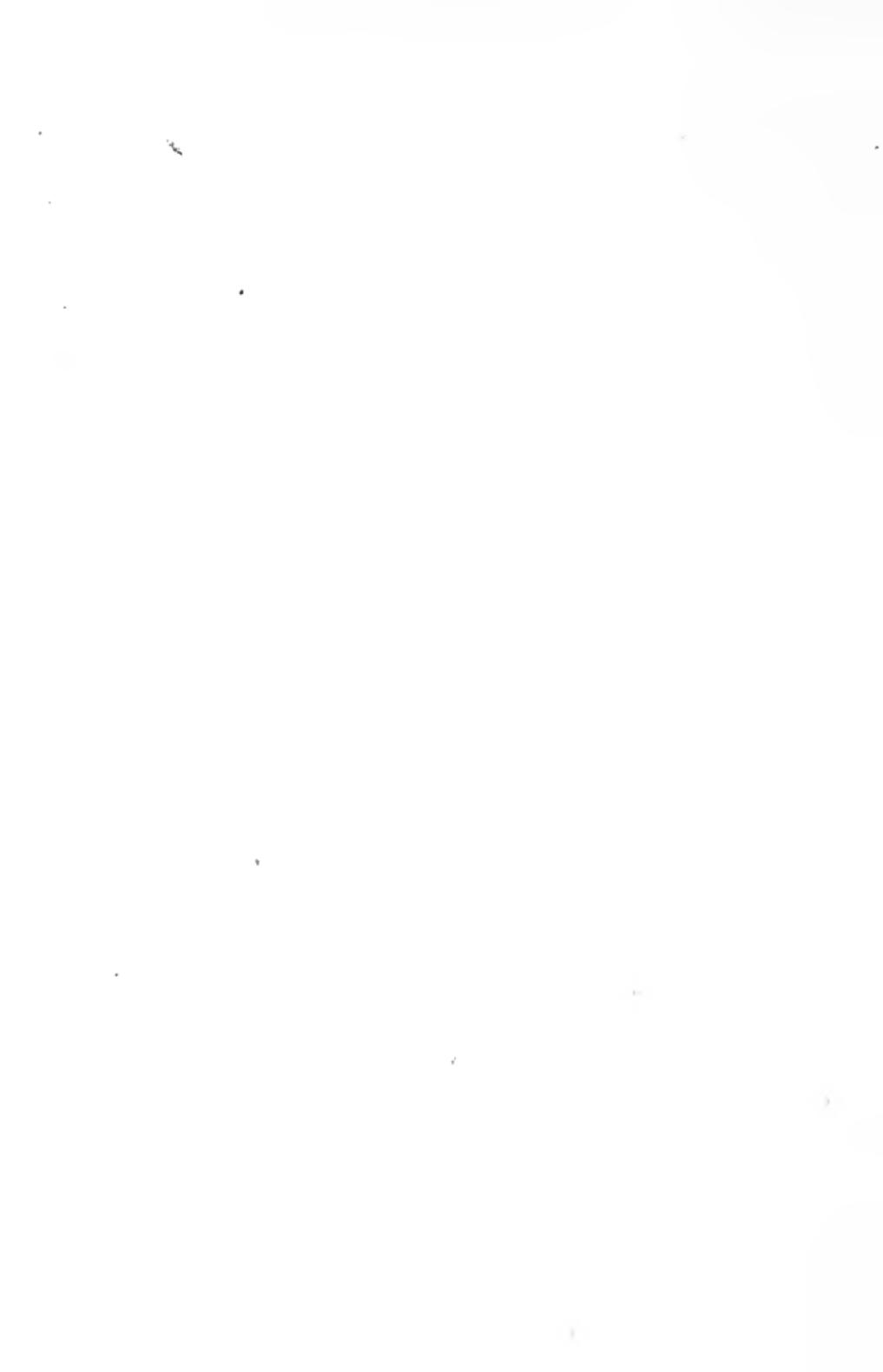
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nection — to the Judge these projects were as good as established.

Rounding the corner out of sight, the children waved gay farewells. Martha Mary trudged on contentedly; yet she, too, was not without aspirations. A little red cart is nice, but by no means so imposing as a large wagon with glass sides. Then, the bell about Mark's neck, though it registered their progress conscientiously was, nevertheless, a cow bell, and had a flat and dolorous note.

Some day — on this point Martha Mary was positive — some day, she would have a gong.

THE END



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